

Radioactive dumps threaten cottage country

by Lynn Jones and Johanna Echlin, Cottage Living, 2019

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In the 2018 issue of Vie de Chalet / Cottage Living a timeline on the proposed Chalk River nuclear waste dump was published. Since then, news has emerged that Ottawa River shores are slated for not one, but two radioactive dumps, both of which disregard international safety guidelines and could permanently contaminate the Ottawa River with radioactive materials such as plutonium, caesium, strontium and tritium.

In case you missed last year's article, here is a recap:

In 1944 Chalk River Laboratories (CRL) was established to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Starting in 1952 it was operated by "Atomic Energy of Canada Limited" (AECL). Besides producing plutonium, CRL established a prototype nuclear power reactor (NPD) upstream of Chalk River at Rolphton, and extracted medical isotopes from irradiated fuel.

These activities and two serious accidents created large quantities of dangerous radioactive wastes, and clean-up is estimated at \$8 billion.

The Harper government radically restructured AECL in 2015, creating a subsidiary called Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL) and contracting a multinational consortium (CNEA), including SNC-Lavalin, to operate the subsidiary and reduce the federal government's liability from nuclear clean-up quickly and cheaply. Annual costs to taxpayers tripled shortly after restructuring.

In 2016, CNL proposed to construct a giant above-ground mound of radioactive waste (NSDF) at Chalk River, and to entomb the NPD reactor at Rolphton in concrete.

Independent experts, retired AECL scientists, citizens' groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 140 municipalities and several First Nations have been sounding alarm bells about the projects via written comments, resolutions, press conferences, and protests.

In April 2018, CNL was granted a 10-year license despite widespread concern that license changes would make it easier for the consortium to get its nuclear waste projects approved. Canada's nuclear regulator the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), considered by many Canadians to be a "captured" agency that serves the interest of the industry it is intended to regulate, granted the new license.

Updated timeline since last year's publication:

April 2018: Opponents hold a press conference and rally on Parliament Hill to highlight mismanagement of nuclear waste by the Government of Canada. Five First Nations and 39 NGOs and citizens' groups write the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency requesting an investigation. Canadian Press article appears in papers across the country.

May and June 2018: NGOs and citizens keep up pressure on politicians with letter writing campaigns and briefing sessions.

August 21 and 22, 2018: CNL briefs CNSC on its decommissioning plans for federal nuclear reactors. Citizens groups and NGOs brief media at National Press Theatre on Federal Government's lack of national policies for nuclear reactor decommissioning. A letter to the Auditor General of Canada (signed by 87 citizens groups, First Nations and NGOs), requests inquiry into management of federally-owned nuclear waste.

August 22, 2018: Many organizations, including labour union Unifor demonstrate their opposition to CNLs nuclear dump proposals during Red Canoe March outside CNSC headquarters in Ottawa.

September and October 2018: Hype increases about "new generation of small modular nuclear reactors" to be developed at Chalk River Laboratories. Government of Canada websites trumpet this development and announce support and funding. Many are concerned that a new generation of reactors would create a new generation of toxic radioactive waste.

September-November 2018; Nuclear Waste becomes an issue in the Ontario municipal election with candidates from Deep River to Ottawa asked to take a stand on the nuclear waste dump issue. On October 11, 2018 the Ottawa Citizen reports that most Ottawa candidates oppose the nuclear dump at Chalk River

September to December 2018: Unions become more involved in fight against the nuclear waste dumps. Unifor unanimously passes a resolution in Québec City in November; Conseil central des syndicats nationaux de l'Outaouais addresses proposed dumps in Fort-Coulonge in December

November 5-7, 2018: Press conferences on Parliament Hill - "Red Light for Canada's Nuclear Road Map" - and protest march in downtown Ottawa call on government to properly deal with existing waste before creating more.

November 2018: Conferences held by Anishinabek Nation in North Bay Ontario and Ottawa Riverkeeper at Gatineau City Hall. Further delays in the timelines for the NSDF and NPD projects announced by CNSC. No firm dates available.

December 15, 2018: Citizens' groups and NGOs meet at Pine Lodge in Bristol to plan a strategy for the coming year's Federal election campaign identified as a key focus.

February 2019: Canadian consortium member, SNC-Lavalin becomes the subject of a high profile political corruption scandal stemming from efforts to buy its way out of criminal charges for fraud and bribery.

March 2019: CNL announced that permits are being processed for 2,000 shipments of low, intermediate and high level radioactive waste from the Whiteshell nuclear reactor in Manitoba to Chalk River. The plan is to consolidate all federally owned radioactive waste at Chalk River. It is anticipated that there will be more radioactive waste coming from other locations as well.

Readers who wish to support the effort to keep radioactive waste out of the Ottawa River are encouraged to sign & share the Avaaz petition <https://tinyurl.com/y6swvb2b> "Canadian Government must protect our rivers from radioactive waste" and contact us: www.concernedcitizens.net

Lynn Jones is a member of Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area. She has called l'Île-aux-Allumettes, Québec home for 33 years and has been actively involved in efforts to keep radioactive waste out of the Ottawa River since the mid-1990s. www.concernedcitizens.net

Johanna Echlin is a retired psychotherapist. She spends every summer at the family cottage on the Ottawa River near Sheenboro, Québec. She is strongly opposed to CNL's proposal and has been a spokesperson for Old Fort William Cottagers' Association regarding CNL since summer 2016.

**TRANSPORTING NUCLEAR WASTE
FROM DECOMMISSIONED
WHITESHELL LABORATORIES, MANITOBA**

CNL estimates 1500 shipments of low level waste,
500 shipments of intermediate level waste and
47-50 shipments of high level waste will be transported
by road for long term storage or disposal at Chalk River.