

Canada's irradiated nuclear fuel – can we afford to abandon it?

Background:

February 13 2020

On January 31, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) voted against allowing a Deep Geological Repository (DGR) for “Low and Intermediate-Level Radioactive Wastes” (LILW) on their traditional territory near Lake Huron. As a result, that project (promoted by Ontario Power Generation, a government utility that owns all of Ontario's 18 operating nuclear reactors) is now officially off the table.

However, plans to build a DGR for HIGH-level nuclear waste (HLW) — millions of times more radioactive than the low-level and intermediate-level waste — are so far unaffected by this turn of events. Indeed, one of the two candidate sites for locating a DGR for high-level waste is ALSO in the territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, and is in fact not very far from the OTHER DGR that has now been dropped from consideration.

Here is a link to Part 1 of a two-part documentary on Canada's irradiated nuclear fuel, also called “high-level radioactive waste”, broadcast on the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) on February 7. Part 2 will be following shortly.

The film-maker is APTN's Christopher Read. He communicates to his viewers the official story from representatives of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) — an industry owned and operated body — about their plans to bury this waste in a Deep Geological Repository (DGR) near a “willing host community” and to eventually abandon it there, even though the contents will remain incredibly dangerous to human health and to the environment of living things for millions of years — far longer than the span of human history.

See http://ccnr.org/hlw_graph.html for a graph of radiotoxicity of HLW over a period of ten million years.

Some of the views of Gordon Edwards, President of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility (CCNR) are also included. One learns that previous DGRs have failed, that the “multiple barriers” philosophy has not prevented catastrophic nuclear reactor accidents from occurring, that undisturbed geological formations cannot be accessed without disturbing them, that flooding of any underground repository is inevitable, that the permanent safe disposal of nuclear waste remains an unsolved problem of the human race, and that a policy of “Rolling Stewardship” rather than abandonment of the waste is an alternative, more responsible approach.

One also learns that plutonium, a human-made element that is the primary nuclear explosive in the world's arsenals of nuclear weapons, is a significant part of the used nuclear fuel. There are powerful interests that will want to extract the plutonium before burying the waste. Such an extraction is only possible by converting the high-level waste into a liquid or powder form, making the material much more easily dispersed into the environment, while making plutonium available as an article of commerce that is bound to fall into the hands of criminals, terrorists, and/or militaristic regimes. The dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation will persist for hundreds of thousands of years if plutonium extraction occurs.

See http://ccnr.org/Peaceful_Atom.html .

Gordon Edwards.

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APTN (Part 1): Indigenous communities courted as nuclear industry looks for place to put used fuel
<https://aptnews.ca/2020/02/07/indigenous-communities-courted-as-nuclear-industry-looks-for-place-to-put-used-fuel/>