

Media Advisory

For immediate release

Operating Gentilly-2 and Point Lepreau ill-advised in light of Japanese and French reports

Will lessons from Fukushima be ignored in Canada?

Québec, July 11, 2012 - Two voluminous reports from Japan and France draw important lessons from the Fukushima nuclear disaster that go against the proposed extended operation of nuclear power plants at Gentilly-2 in Québec, and at Point Lepreau in New Brunswick.

In Japan, an independent special commission on Fukushima, established by the Japanese parliament, issued a condensed 88-page report on 5 July 2012 (the complete report in Japanese has 630 pages). It is a thorough analysis of the context in which a series of nuclear accidents began in Japan on 11 March 2011.

Unlike the nuclear industry which attributed the cause of the Fukushima nuclear disaster to the devastating tsunami triggered by an earthquake of magnitude 9, the commission sees the root cause of the catastrophe in the poor organization of the nuclear establishment where "*collusion*" between the industry, the regulator and the government, is dominant.

Well before March 2011, scientists had warned authorities that a devastating tsunami could occur and that nuclear reactors were threatened. The Japanese nuclear regulatory agency had done nothing to impose corrective measures. The report also reveals that the earthquake itself likely caused damage to the nuclear power plant before the tsunami arrived 40 minutes later.

In France, the Nuclear Safety Authority (*Autorité de sûreté nucléaire, ASN*) issued at the end of June 2012 a 510-page report informing the nuclear industry of new measures to be imposed to reduce the likelihood of serious nuclear accidents and to cope with them when they occur. The ASN is talking about a massive investment to achieve this goal and about training a nuclear emergency team of competent experts.

In Canada, the *Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC)* held in Ottawa on May 3 a public meeting to discuss the lessons from Fukushima. Unlike the Japanese and the French who insist on the need to rigorously respect seismic standards, the CNSC in February 2012 granted the permit to operate the reactor at Point Lepreau, which is nearing the end of its refurbishment, despite the fact that it could be subjected to an earthquake exceeding the design value for its earthquake resistance.

Public statements and e-mails of CNSC President, Dr. Michael Binder, clearly show that

the CNSC is preparing to grant Hydro-Quebec an operating license renewal despite the fact that Gentilly-2 does not meet modern seismic standards and in spite of incompletely resolved technical problems. In the early '70s the seismic standards for new buildings were lower than today. The Gentilly-2 nuclear reactor in Bécancour was not designed to withstand earthquakes that modern office buildings in this region are designed to withstand today.

Despite our repeated requests the CNSC has refused to inform the public of this situation in an objective and scientific manner. In this regard, the CNSC does not fully respect Article 9 of the *Nuclear Safety and Control Act* of 1997.

At the end of August will be held in Vienna an international conference on lessons learned from Fukushima. The CNSC will represent Canada, but the statements and writings of its top managers raise the following question : will the CNSC reveal in Vienna that it does not fully respect Article 9 of the Act of 1997, and thereby does not comply with the recommendations of the Japanese and French reports regarding transparency? We raise a question similar to the one raised by Greenpeace in its February 2012 report on the lessons from Fukushima : is the CNSC at the level of the Japanese and French recommendations following Fukushima?

Each day brings new questions about nuclear power plant safety. A federal report is seriously concerned about the deterioration of concrete at Gentilly-2 (alkali-silica reactions), a recurring problem in road infrastructure. Furthermore, employees on strike since July 9th at SNC-Lavalin (which in 2011 acquired *Atomic Energy Canada Limited*) highlight the alleged irresponsible behavior of their new employer, which in their view wants to cut jobs held by employees who are competent and experienced in order to save on wages at the expense of safety.

In conclusion, we point out the need for an independent commission of inquiry in order to fully inform the public about nuclear power in Canada and to lower the risk of a severe nuclear accident. The Japanese report showed a troubling situation of "collusion" involving the nuclear industry, the regulatory agency and the government, to the detriment of the public. From the beginning the Japanese insist that their report is aimed at Japan and the world. We ask this question: are there reasons to believe that the Japanese report has lessons for Canada with regard to the regulatory management of nuclear operations? An independent commission of inquiry could illuminate the issue.

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