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Government's early holiday gift to the nuclear industry "naughty, not nice"

Public interest groups across Canada reject federal funding of small modular nuclear reactors

OTTAWA, December 17, 2020 – Public interest groups across Canada are criticizing the federal government for funding development of prototype small modular nuclear reactors (SMR) with the SMR action plan that is [expected to be announced tomorrow](#). [Friday, Dec. 18]

"Not a penny should go from taxpayers to nuclear corporations when the private sector is not willing to fund the huge cost of these dirty, dangerous technologies," said **Prof. Susan O'Donnell** from the **Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick** and member of a national stop-SMRs action group. "Canada needs to take real climate action by investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency, not nuclear experiments."

"The federal government's early Christmas present to the nuclear industry is naughty, not nice," said **Gordon Edwards**, President of the **Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility**. "Not only is it a waste of money. The stocking is also filled with more 'get-out-of-jail free' cards for the nuclear industry, like exempting small reactors from the Impact Assessment Act."

The Santa for the nuclear industry is Canada's Minister of Natural Resources Seamus O'Regan. The government's SMR Action Plan is expected to include a big bag of goodies for private sector companies, mostly [based in the US and UK](#) – millions in taxpayer funding to develop experimental nuclear reactors.

Federal funding for new nuclear energy is opposed by [over 70 groups](#) from coast to coast, including the West Coast Environmental Law Association, Friends of the Earth Canada, Greenpeace Canada, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Environmental Defence, Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick, Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan, Concerned Citizens of Manitoba, Northwatch, Sierra Club Canada Foundation, Ralliement contre la pollution radioactive, Équiterre and the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility.

A Special Chiefs Assembly of the **Assembly of First Nations** passed a unanimous resolution in December 2018 demanding "that the Government of Canada cease funding and support of the Small Modular Nuclear Reactors program" ([Resolution no. 62](#)).

"Building new nuclear reactors does not belong in a climate action plan," said **O'Donnell**. "Leading researchers [have shown](#) that investing in renewable energy is the best path to net zero and that adding nuclear energy to the mix actually hinders rather than helps."

Shawn-Patrick Stensil, Director of Programs at **Greenpeace Canada**, said: "The Liberal government is [throwing good money after bad](#). Hypothetical new nuclear power technologies have been promising to be the next big thing for the last forty years, but in spite of massive public subsidies, that prospect has never panned out."

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"Next-generation nuclear reactors are a dirty, dangerous distraction from tackling the climate crisis. Nuclear energy is not green, not clean, too costly and too slow to build," said **Kerrie Blaise**, Northern Services Legal Counsel, **Canadian Environmental Law Association**.

The groups charge that the federal government is trying to save the nuclear industry rather than saving the environment and protecting health.

The groups say ([See Backgrounder below](#)):

- Small Modular Reactor (SMR) development is too slow to address the climate crisis
- SMRs are far more expensive than renewable energy
- Nuclear power creates fewer jobs than renewable energy
 - SMRs are dirty and dangerous

The federal government has never consulted the public about small modular reactors, which would create environmental risks and financial liabilities for Canadians.

An ever-growing number of [public interest groups oppose SMR funding](#) and have endorsed a Statement on Small Modular Reactors.

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Backgrounder: Why SMRs Are a Dirty Dangerous Distraction

Small Modular Reactor (SMR) development is too slow to address the climate crisis:

The [2020 World Nuclear Industry Status Report](#) says that developing new nuclear energy is too slow to address the climate crisis – as well as more expensive – compared to renewable energy and energy efficiency. No SMRs have yet been built and the models being proposed will take a decade or more to develop.

SMRs are more expensive than renewable energy:

A [Canadian study](#) found that energy from small nuclear reactors would be up to ten times the cost of renewable energy. In the past decade, the cost of building solar, wind power and battery storage has gone down dramatically, while the cost of building new nuclear reactors has gone up. Small reactors will be even more expensive per unit of power than the current large ones. The most advanced SMR project to date in the US has already [doubled its estimated cost](#) – from \$3B to over \$6B.

Nuclear power creates fewer jobs than renewable energy:

Renewable energy is one of the fastest-growing job sectors in North America. An [American study](#) found that solar energy leads to six times as many jobs as nuclear power for each gigawatt-hour of electricity generated.

There are better sources of energy:

Minister O'Regan has said repeatedly, without providing evidence, that there is no path to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions without nuclear energy. In fact, on the contrary a [new study](#) of 123 countries over 25 years found that countries that invested in renewable energy lowered their carbon emissions much more than those reliant on nuclear energy.

SMRs are dirty and dangerous:

The new "small" reactors, proposed to be built across Canada, will produce radioactive waste of many kinds. Some of the proposed models would extract plutonium from irradiated fuel, worsening concerns about weapons proliferation and creating new forms of radioactive waste that are especially dangerous to manage. The federal government currently [has no detailed policy or strategy](#) for what to do with radioactive waste, and no design or location for a deep underground repository where industry proposes to store high-level radioactive waste for hundreds of thousands of years.

Any Canadian NGO can add its name to this statement at

The Union of Ontario Indians and the Assembly of First Nations have both denounced SMR funding:
www.ccnr.org/COO_resolution_SMRS_2018.pdf
www.ccnr.org/AFN_resolution_SMRS_2018.pdf