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Giant Radioactive Waste Dump on the Ottawa River: New revelations alarm citizens' groups

(Ottawa, Ontario, April 3, 2017) The draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for a proposed giant nuclear waste dump along the Ottawa River is ringing alarm bells for citizens' groups. It reveals that the dump would contain plutonium and dozens of other waste products created by nuclear reactors, many of which will be radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years.

The proposed "Near Surface Disposal Facility" (NSDF) would be built on a 34-hectare site about one km from the Ottawa River at Canadian Nuclear Laboratories in Chalk River, Ontario. The site is about 150 kilometres northwest of Ottawa, across the river from the Municipality of Sheenboro in the Province of Quebec. The dump would be similar in design to a municipal landfill. It would be used for permanent disposal of up to one million cubic meters of "low-level" and "intermediate-level" radioactive wastes in a mound up to 25 meters high.

The draft environmental impact statement (EIS) was released on March 17th. A CNSC (Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission) decision on approval of the facility is expected in January 2018 and construction could begin soon after.

Johanna Echlin of the Old Fort William Cottagers' Association was shocked to learn that the dump would contain very long-lived radionuclides. "How can it possibly be ethical and environmentally-responsible to put plutonium and other very long-lived radioactive wastes in a landfill beside the Ottawa River?" she asks. "I have talked to many people on both sides of the river, all the way to Montreal, and everyone I have spoken to thinks this is a terrible idea."

Plutonium is one of many radioactive byproducts of nuclear fission that would be present in significant quantities in wastes disposed of in the NSDF. Inhaling or ingesting plutonium or other radionuclides (e.g., in dust from the waste dump or runoff into the river) would increase risks of cancers of the lung, bones, blood and liver.

Dr. Ole Hendrickson is reviewing the draft EIS for the Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area. He says that the landfill-type design would expose radioactive wastes to wind, rain and snow. Long-lived radioactive wastes would be hazardous long after plastic liners had deteriorated and leachate collection and treatment had ceased, and would spread into surrounding wetlands, lakes and waterways.

“By failing to provide adequate waste containment, this proposal flagrantly disregards the International Atomic Energy Agency’s safety standard for disposal of radioactive waste,” warns Hendrickson.

The public has 60 days to respond to the EIS (until May 17, 2017). It is posted on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency website at: <http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/050/document-eng.cfm?document=118381>

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Old Fort William Cottagers’ Association:
www.ofwca.org/SheenOFWCA/OFWCACNL.html

Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area:
<https://sites.google.com/site/concernedcitizensrca/>

Backgrounders:

Ten things Canadians need to know	http://tinyurl.com/mxoaks7
The Chalk River Mega-Dump – Five Fatal Flaws	http://tinyurl.com/mmjjnw6
Radioactive Materials proposed for the Mega-Dump	http://tinyurl.com/n6lr89h
Disregard of international safety standards	http://tinyurl.com/kks8lnn
Backgrounder by <i>Old Fort William Cottagers’ Assoc.</i>	http://tinyurl.com/mlrh8a6