

Radioactive Shipment Will Put Great Lakes at Risk



Bruce Power has proposed a plan to ship 16 radioactive steam generators through the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway to Sweden where they would be partly decontaminated and the metal sold back to consumer markets. The total amount of radioactivity of the waste is 60 times greater than the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) limit for transport through inland waterways, as outlined in the IAEA's Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials. Not only does the shipment threaten drinking water in the region, but it also sets a dangerous precedent for shipping radioactive waste through the Great Lakes Basin. City mayors, U.S. Senators, environmental organizations and other concerned groups, First Nations communities and European civil society have opposed the proposal and demanded the shipments be stopped.

Bruce Power's plan

Bruce Power plans to "recycle" 90 per cent of the 16 steam generators. The Ontario-based nuclear company has contracted Swedish company Studsvik to ship, decontaminate, melt down and sell the metal from the generators on consumer markets. Studsvik will return 10 per cent of the most radioactive parts to Bruce Power.

Special licence

As noted in a staff report by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), Bruce Power had to apply for a special licence from the CNSC "because the size of the steam generators makes it impractical to package them, the interior cannot be accessed which does not allow direct confirmation of the estimated internal surface contamination levels, and the total activity in the shipment is estimated to exceed the limits of the regulations for Surface Contaminated Objects material transported onboard a single ship." Nearly 80 groups, including the Council of Canadians, provided written submissions on the licence application, and half of them intervened at a public hearing held September 28-29, 2010. Despite the objections, the CNSC approved Bruce Power's application in February 2011. Bruce Power has received necessary permits from the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority, but needs permits from the US Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the Ontario government and other jurisdictions to proceed.

The Great Lakes in Context

The Great Lakes holds nearly 20 per cent of the world's freshwater and 95 per cent of North America's freshwater. The Lakes provide drinking water to 40 million people in surrounding areas. In the report, *Our Great Lakes Commons: A People's Plan to Protect the*

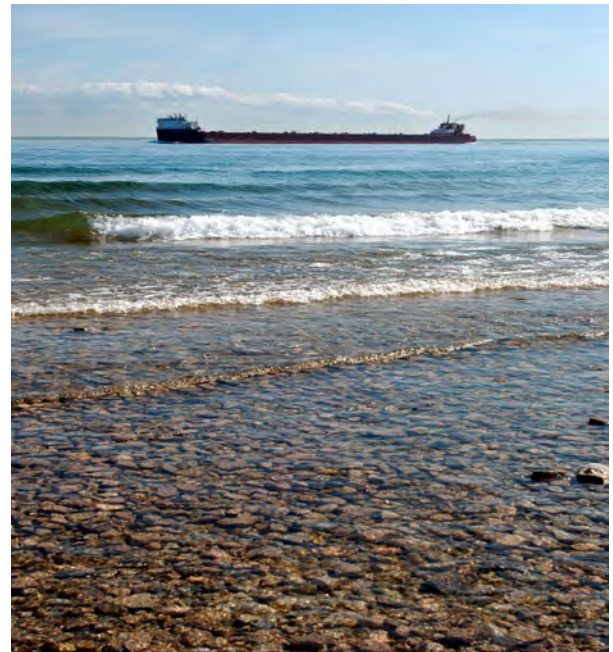


Photo: Michiganseagrant

Many ships bring goods across the Great Lakes. Allowing shipments of radioactive materials on the Lakes, a drinking source for millions, is a serious environmental risk.

Great Lakes Forever, Maude Barlow calls for the Lakes to be declared a commons, public trust and protected bioregion. With the dangers of shipments of radioactive waste, the proximity of nuclear power plants and other threats to the Great Lakes, we need a new framework to manage the lakes that builds upon the great work that civil society, communities and progressive politicians have done to date.

A Great Lakes Basin Commons Watershed Plan would include:

- A ban on all nuclear shipments on the Great Lakes.
- A process for citizens and communities living on the Basin to sue corporations and governments that knowingly polluting their local water sources for violation of their human right to clean water.
- Clear adoption of the precautionary principle, which would place the burden of proving the safety of any proposal on the applicant, in all federal, state and provincial laws pertaining to the Great Lakes.

Threats to Drinking Water

The CNSC has affirmed that the radioactivity of the shipment exceeds IAEA guidelines by six times, which is true for limits of ocean-going shipments. However, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence

“Creating a Great Lakes Protected Bioregion would require a change in the relationship of the humans who depend on the watershed from one of exploitation to one of respect.”

- Maude Barlow, National Chairperson, The Council of Canadians

Cities Initiatives (GLSLCI) noted that radioactivity of a single ship exceeds IAEA guidelines for inland-water shipments (lakes and rivers) by 60 times. The GLSLCI also noted that an accident with only one generator in Owen Sound Harbour has the potential to exceed Health Canada’s Drinking Water Action Levels by six times (if release rate is 100 per cent) which could violate people’s right to clean and safe drinking water. The International Institute of Concern for Public Health (IICPH) has noted that radionuclides found in the Great Lakes, including tritium, carbon-14, cesium and long-lived iodine-129, pose a serious health hazard even at low levels. An accident on the Great Lakes would further contribute to radioactivity and pollution in the Great Lakes.

The need for an Environmental Assessment

In a 2006 environmental assessment process Bruce Power had proposed to leave the steam generators on-site. In a presentation to the Saugeen Ojibway Nations, Bruce Power had even stated that “much of the waste, and particularly low and intermediate level waste containing radioactivity cannot be recycled for safety and environmental reasons.” However, without providing a rationale, CNSC staff have concluded that this shipment does not fall within the definition of a project under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and therefore did not require a new review.

Setting a Dangerous Precedent

This shipment could set a dangerous precedent for regularly sending radioactive waste that exceeds legal limits through the Great Lakes. Bruce Power and Studsvik have a contract for the shipment of 32 steam generators, and Bruce Power has 64 steam generators in total. So this could be the first of several shipments of radioactive waste through the Great Lakes. At a House of Commons’ committee on natural resources hearing, Michael Binder, President of the CNSC, admitted that this type of shipment has never been done before.

Applying the Precautionary Principle

We encourage the CNSC to apply the “precautionary principle” to Bruce Power’s proposed plans. Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environmental and Development describes this principle: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities.

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” The “precautionary principle” is recognized by more than 20 international treaties and agreements, including the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic and the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area.

Public consultation a key principle

There has been considerable and growing opposition to the shipment among environmental groups, women’s organizations, First Nations and other members of civil society. Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Patrick Madahbee has stated that, “The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has failed to fulfill its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations on contemplated actions that may impact upon constitutionally protected Treaty and Aboriginal rights.” The report *Our Great Lakes Commons: A People’s Plan to Protect the Great Lakes Forever* notes that public participation is key to the Great Lakes Basin Commons and that a Great Lakes Basin Commons must encourage and empower decision-making at the local level.

Take Action!

Contact federal Environment Minister Peter Kent and Ontario’s Environment Minister today and tell them the shipment must be stopped!

The Honourable Peter Kent
Minister of the Environment
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, 28th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0H3

Tel.: 819-997-1441 e-mail: Minister@ec.gc.ca

Ontario Environment Minister
Ferguson Block, 11th Flr
77 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON M7A 2T5
Tel.: 1-416-314-6790