

NUCLEAR WASTE IN THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

– WHY WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED

This article by board member Dodie LeGassick was originally published in the March 2018 issue of the Oliver-Paipoonge News.

The burial of the highest level of nuclear wastes, which are the spent nuclear fuel bundles from all of Canada's 20 nuclear reactors is an issue that warrants the public's concern; especially, since the NWMO, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, has recently narrowed down their northern sites to just three.

The Ignace area, specifically the Revell Lake Site is the most advanced in their investigations since it has already reached the borehole drilling and testing stage during which they test the granite. Revell Lake, just 30 km. from Ignace, is a potential site for a DGR, meaning a Deep Geological Repository. This repository will be 500 meters below ground, will take up 600 hectares or 1,480 acres underground and will have surface facilities that will take up 250 acres above ground. Information about NWMO's plans has been made available within the areas of Ignace, Wabigoon and Dryden but very little has reached the public in and around the city of Thunder Bay and the communities and municipalities along the proposed transportation routes of Hwy. 61, 61 to Hwy 11, Hwy 102 to 11/17 and Hwy 11 to Ignace. Every community along the proposed transportation route needs to become aware of some very serious concerns. This article focuses on one concern and that is the transportation of the spent nuclear fuel bundles through Northwestern Ontario, specifically from Nipigon to Ignace.

As of 2014, the nuclear power industry has produced over 3 million spent fuel bundles of nuclear waste that weigh over 50,000 tons. At this point N.W.M.O. speaks of transporting 4.8 million spent fuel bundles at about 80,000 tons and they have projected in their Triennial Report figures up to 7.2 million spent fuel bundles which brings the tonnage closer to 120,000 tons. There are three ways to transport the nuclear waste from Canada's twenty reactor sites: by rail, by ship and by transport truck. At this time, they refer primarily to transport trucks as their preferred method of transport. Their plan is to put the nuclear fuel bundles into casks that they have said are indestructible. That brings to mind images of the indestructible Titanic. One or two truckloads per day for approximately 38 years would transport this waste, the highest level, most toxic, radioactive waste from all of Canada's nuclear reactors; from Point Lepreau in New Brunswick, from Gentilly in Quebec, from Whiteshell in Manitoba and the remaining ninety percent of spent fuel bundles from Southern Ontario's reactors from Bruce, Darlington, Pickering and lastly, from the Chalk River site.

Concerns about truck collisions prompted me to apply to M.T.O. for the right to access their latest information which is for the period 2010 to 2015. I examined the data re. all collisions, truck collisions and the percentages of truck collisions versus all collisions from Pickering to Ignace. The findings raise serious concerns because the percentages of truck collisions are highest in Northwestern Ontario between Nipigon and Ignace. The statistics reveal that on average, 32 percent of all collisions between Nipigon and Ignace are truck collisions with the highest percentages between Nipigon and Thunder Bay at 30 percent and then between Shabakwa and Ignace at 41.26 percent. Using even more recent available data from the Thunder Bay Police I found that on average there are 7 truck collisions per year on Dawson Road up to and including Hwy. 102.

The plans for between 620 to 720 truckloads per year for thirty eight years means that several thousand truckloads of spent nuclear fuel bundles may pass through on our local highways. What are the chances that over this period of time nothing will ever happen and that no community will ever be affected? Given the statistics one may argue that the spent nuclear fuel bundles should not be transported through Northwestern Ontario. In fact, given the potential for accidents, the waste should not be removed from their sites. Finland has developed a deep geological repository which is scheduled to open in 2020. What is most interesting about Finland's plan is that their deep geological repository is located just five kilometers from their nuclear reactors which are located on an island. Also noteworthy is that they are going to bury just 6,500 tons versus Canada's potentially 120,000 tons. If you google "Finland- Into Eternity" you can view a film documentary about their DGR for more information.

The intent of this article has been simply to highlight the risks of transport truck collisions in Northwestern Ontario as one area of concern. There will be an opportunity to hear more information about why we should be concerned later in March at the Rosslyn Community Centre.

Event at 7:00 pm on Wednesday March 28