

Citizens Inquiry
into the
Impacts of the Uranium Cycle
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

“DO NO HARM”

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world.

Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

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Introduction

I wish to thank all those who had the foresight to hold this Citizens' Enquiry into the Impacts of the Uranium Cycle. We are fortunate to have within our midst such courageous leaders with a vision of what it takes to sustain our neighbourhood, our township, our county, our province and our country.

The determination and commitment of so many individuals and groups will lead to a successful outcome for all those concerned with preserving the positive relationship between the aboriginal people of Canada and the rest of us who are immigrants to this great country, preserving the health of all of us, and preventing the desecration of our land resources.

As Margaret Mead has said:

“Never doubt that a small group of citizens can change the world.

Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

In preparing for this presentation, we thought we would identify key research findings that would convince the corporations and governments that there are no redeeming qualities for the use of uranium. The harmful impact of uranium mining and its products are well documented and we support alternatives to nuclear energy, weapons, and uses in health and research work.

We were frankly overwhelmed with the amount of evidence-based documentation regarding the hazards of uranium. The science is there, the research is clear: uranium and all of its byproducts are toxic. They are a danger to our health, our water, our air, and our safety. In the few instances where uranium does provide some limited benefit, there are safer and cleaner alternatives. Governments and corporations are not listening with sufficient care.

It became clear that, with such a wealth of evidence of the dangers of uranium, the issue is one of public education as well as developing political will to change our hazardous and harmful ways.

This paper therefore will give a few examples of the risks, but will concentrate on the political landscape that keeps us embroiled in this controversy.



The principle that guides the following discussion is our belief that having the privilege of living on this planet, we “**do no harm**” to others, our community, and our environment; we do this for all the children and their children’s children.

Aboriginal Rights



In the case of Robertsville, and in many other uranium mining sites, there is a connection with the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people have an inherent desire to protect our land and water. Aboriginal people know the dangers of pollution, toxicity, and habitat destruction. We can be thankful for their awareness and sensitivity to the earth, water, and air.

The government needs to recognize the dangers of uranium mining to its fullest extent. They must consult with the aboriginal community. They need to protect the Robertsville land and all other land from the devastation of mining, tailing ponds, radioactive dust and water and air contamination. The public, mining corporations, and the government need to listen carefully and accommodate aboriginal concerns.

South Dakota and Nebraska Experience

Our research led us to a specific example that mirrors the Robertsville situation and is a warning of what could follow if the corporations and governments are successful in developing uranium mining in our neighbourhood. The following is an excerpt from the website, *Bring Back the Way*¹ and outlines the experience of communities in South Dakota and Nebraska.

On November 12, 2007, seven petitioners from parts of the poorest region in the United States asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to participate in decisions relative to uranium mining and its harmful effects in northwestern Nebraska and the Lakota (Sioux) Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Southwest South Dakota.

“The entire issue is water, which is life itself, and our struggle is to protect it.”

Petitioner Thomas Cook

Crow Buttes Resources (CBR), a Colorado based company owned by Cameco, a Canadian Company, is asking the NRC for a permit to expand uranium mining in and around petitioners’ towns, farms, and Indian territories. Petitioners assert that company’s mining process currently consumes and contaminates 4.7 billion gallons of

¹ www.bringbacktheway.org

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water per year from the High Plains Aquifer which is also the water source to communities in eight western states.

The petition (see <http://www.bringbacktheway.com/> for text) challenges CBR's request for an additional 2.4 billion gallons a year to expand its operations.

The mining company's application is made while drought is depleting the aquifers at 160% of recharge.

In addition to the use of additional valuable water resources, the mining company has admitted to:

- a spill of approximately 300,000 gallons of radioactive liquid waste at its mine in Crawford, Nebraska ;
- failure to clean up one-third of the spills equaling approximately 100,000 gallons of radioactive liquid waste;
- admission that a broken coupling led to a one gallon per minute leak for several years into the Brule aquifer. (It is believed that the leak resulted in toxic contamination of at least 525,000 gallons of water per year); and
- admission of a leak that contaminated 25,000 sq. ft. of the Brule aquifer.

From existing operations, CBR has had no less than 23 reported leaks of radioactive material.

Petitioners assert that this contradicts CBR's statements that they have operated without any environmental impact and indicates that CBR should not be allowed to expand its existing operations.

Petitioners are asking the NRC for a chance to submit evidence that a slow-moving, underground radioactive plume of contaminated water is moving through several inter-connected aquifers.

CBR's own expansion application to the NRC states that the toxins that have leaked into the aquifers probably enter the human body through water as well as food sources exposed to the contamination. These toxins include Radon-222, Thorium, Uranium and inorganic Arsenic.

Indigenous petitioners from Native American communities also assert that the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples applies in this situation.

Article 32 acknowledges that Indigenous peoples have a right to "free, prior and informed consent" with respect to development, utilization or exploitation of mineral resources. It further provides that "States shall provide effective mechanisms for just

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and fair redress for any such activities, and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental ... impact." To date, no opportunity has been provided for members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe or Native communities to analyze CBR's License Amendment or its affect on Indigenous lands and resources.

Petitioners stress that it would be entirely consistent with international human rights standards if the NRC affirms the Indigenous peoples' right to intervene in the permit process for CBR's application. It is currently unknown when to expect a decision from the NRC.

Can you believe it? The corporation has admitted to disturbing failures to ensure safe mining by the release of toxic material into the aquifers and yet, want permission to expand their operations. The petitioners are left trying to stop an expansion, when the business should be shut down completely.

It is an example of how corporations, driven by profit, ignore safety, health and environmental issues. A responsible company would not say there are no environmental consequences of the toxic releases. A responsible company would close up its operations immediately.

It is an example of how governments are unwilling to hold corporations responsible for the negative impact of uranium mining on our environment and health.

And remember, this was a Canadian company. Similar harmful experiences could happen in North Frontenac Township just as they have in Port Hope, Elliot Lake, and Bancroft.

Corporate Leadership

In Canada we have many companies who are working toward a sustainable environment. There are companies with Boards of Directors which are conscious of the need for maintaining a sustainable planet. Given the huge power of corporations our only hope for a future sustainable economy is that more corporations will see the advantage and importance of operating responsibly.

They must not just work towards more Gross National Product (GNP), but rather gross national health and sustainable environment. These are the goals that should drive corporations, not profit alone. Change happens one company at a time. It is a slow process but one that is moving forward.

Nevertheless, shareholder interests impact the decisions of boards. Directors themselves are often major shareholders.

In our situation, Frontenac Ventures has chosen to mine uranium in a pristine part of Eastern Ontario where residents live close by, and rely on tourism and other small business enterprises for their livelihood.

If mining proceeds in Robertsville area, a radioactive accident will be devastating. The proposed mining sites are in the Mississippi Watershed. This is water that residents far and wide drink and rely on for life. Despite ample evidence and research, Frontenac Ventures fails to understand the dangers and risk to local residents, yet has the support of government. One tailing pond accident could affect the wells of local people and the large number of cities and towns along the Mississippi, Ottawa, and St Lawrence Rivers.

Frontenac Ventures must provide evidence that their mining operation will not harm people living in Eastern Ontario, and will not negatively impact the environment including water and air quality. If mining should proceed, Frontenac Ventures and any other mining company must assume full responsibility for the safety of the site for as long as any radioactivity is present on the site.

Government Action

The Ontario and Federal Governments currently support the nuclear industry and uranium mining. I have written the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Northern Mines and Development and the Premier asking them to assure me that mining uranium will have no negative effects on our earth, water, air, and health.

The **Minister of Environment**, the Honourable John Gerretson passed on my letter to Agatha Garcia-Wright, A/Director Environmental Assessment and Approvals Branch. In a letter dated January 28, 2008, she welcomed my comments, and passed on my letter to the Ministry of Mines and Northern Development (MNDM). She did not address my request for a moratorium on uranium mining in Eastern Ontario.

Nevertheless, she tried to convince me of the important degree of oversight of the government. I quote the following:

“It should be noted that the activities carried out by MNDM, or the applicant, continue to be subject to other provincial and federal legislation, such as the Public Lands Act, the OWRA, EPA, the Aggregate Resources Act, the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, and the federal Fisheries Act.”

Despite this legislation, there are problems at Port Hope, and Elliot Lake. I can only conclude that the extensive requirements in these acts are inadequate in relation to uranium mining and processing based on the science and research currently available.

The **Minister of Natural Resources**, the Honourable Donna Cansfield, had this to say in a letter dated February 6, 2008:

“The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) supports a healthy environment for the people of Ontario by managing the province’s natural resources in an ecologically sustainable way.” and

“Unlike other minerals, should a uranium exploration project ever reach the development stage, it is the federal government through the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, that is primarily responsible for regulating and approving uranium mines in Canada”.

It is our belief, contrary to that of the Minister, that there is no healthy result from uranium mining. It is also apparent by the recent firing of the head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), who was insisting the Atomic Energy Commission Ltd (AECL) meet required safety standards at the Chalk River plant that the CNSC cannot ensure our safety from a nuclear accident. The Federal Government was willing to override our nuclear safety organization. So where are the checks and balances?

The **Minister of Northern Mines and Development**, the Honourable Michael Gravelle, in a letter dated February 6, 2008, told me the following:

“Modern exploration for uranium deposits involves the use of geophysical instruments for drilling, which have very little impact on the environment. Uranium minerals occur naturally in the bedrock and in certain areas these minerals are exposed on surface. The minerals have been part of the natural weathering process for thousands of years. Geophysical instruments measure the existing levels of uranium minerals and cause no impact on the environment.”

He goes on to say:

“The odds of any one exploration project becoming a producing mine in Ontario is about one in 10,000. But should a uranium exploration project even proceed to advanced exploration or the development stage, extensive provincial and federal permitting requirements and environmental protection measures are triggered.....”:

“But the fact remains close to 50% of Ontario’s electricity is produced by nuclear generation. In order to continue powering the province’s nuclear power plants, and by extension the province, we need to ensure we have an adequate supply of uranium.”

Given the above quotations from Minister Gravelle, we are not reassured. He and/or his staff have chosen to ignore the body of evidence against uranium mining that the Community Coalition Against Mining Uranium (CCAMU) and many others have prepared for public education.

At this time, **Premier Dalton McGuinty**, has not responded to our concerns which we sent to him in hard copy. Later we sent our concerns by email. When we still had not

had a reply, we sent him our concerns via his website. Premier Mr. McGuinty is not taking our concerns seriously. He is not taking appropriate leadership on this important issue. In this case he is, so far, ignoring a request for a moratorium on uranium mining in Eastern Ontario.

Prevention

In the Province of Ontario, we spend close to 50% of our tax revenue on illness. This expenditure has continually risen and never decreased. This suggests that our current approach to treating illness is failing. Most public health officials know that the greatest improvement to health is achieved through such things as clean water, clean air, appropriate sewage and garbage disposal. Nevertheless, society has continued to pollute by dumping raw sewage into our oceans and rivers. Our factories continue to spew toxins into the air. Our cars contaminate the environment. Pesticides and herbicides continue to impact our rivers and streams.



We know the consequences of this activity. The consequences are harming our way of life causing sickness at great personal and financial costs. Cancer, asthma, and chronic obstructive lung disease, to name three illnesses, could be reduced by cleaner and non toxic air and water.

But we continue to try to treat illness, rather than prevent the illness in the first place. The province continues to put billions of dollars into illness, while contributing a relatively small sum to prevention and health promotion initiatives. If the balance was more equitable, and we cleaned up the environment including air and water, our health care costs would decrease and we would have a healthier community.

Uranium mining is one of the factors that leads to illness, and contamination of our water and environment. Radioactivity negatively impacts the uranium workers, and the downwind and downstream citizens. The toxic impact can be felt for a very long distance.

And yet, our legislation, the mining act, and our Ministers of Health and Health Promotion allow this to happen. These Ministries should be taking a lead in finding alternatives to this deadly toxic metal, and educating the public about the dangers and risks inherent in uranium mining. It will be the public that finally tips the balance as more and more people become aware of the dangers.

War and Terrorism

I believe Canada is becoming more susceptible to a terrorist attack. The longer Canada fights terrorism by engaging in war in Afghanistan or elsewhere, the more likely we are to have a terrorist attack. This attack could be on a nuclear facility.

Canada can reduce the impact and risks of a terrorist attack by stopping mining uranium. Uranium will end up in the wrong hands. Uranium will end up in weapons. All this leads to killing and harm. There is no safe uranium device.

Given this direction, uranium mining will make its' contribution to terrorism and war which will bring more harm.

**We do not inherit the
earth from our ancestors,
we borrow it from our
children.**

Crazy Horse



The Courts

The Court is not the place to resolve the issues. Court processes are costly, time consuming and end up hurting one party or another. Courts are limited in their actions by the laws of the land and in this case the laws of land require updating and revision based on new knowledge, science, and public concern.

Frontenac Ventures has decided to take their plight to the courts. Frontenac Ventures is unwilling to listen to First Nations concerns. Frontenac Ventures could be a responsible corporate citizen by withdrawing their claim and recognizing that this is not in the best

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interest of the environment, the air, or water. Frontenac Ventures does not need to force this issue of conflict into long, harmful court proceedings.

The government has the power to protect the land and water from unwanted uranium mining. The resolution of the conflict must be a political one.

Peaceful Change

Change will come to the nuclear industry and the mining of uranium. The mining act will be changed to protect our precious woodland, lakes, water and air from unwanted intrusion of the unsafe practice of uranium mining.

Change will come slowly. Change will require adding one person at a time to the cause; but change will come. Patience is necessary.



Politicians, governments, and judges are bound to uphold current law and practices. These powerful elements will respond when enough people support the change in the law and current practices.

Change must be peaceful. Peaceful and law abiding protest will result in change. Peaceful protest is meaningful and powerful. To do otherwise will paint us with the same brush as our oppressors. Peace begets peace and with sufficient and committed numbers, we will not be ignored.

Conclusion

We must continue to convince corporations, governments, and the courts that we have an obligation to protect our planet for future generations. We can do this by using alternatives to nuclear energy which simply and conclusively harm all people, the earth, and the future. There is another way.

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Margaret Mead