

CANADIANS CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA TO BAN THE REPROCESSING OF NUCLEAR FUEL WASTE TO EXTRACT PLUTONIUM

OBJECTIVE

Canada is currently formulating a new national policy on radioactive waste management.

Natural Resources Canada issued a 2022 draft policy for public comment. It stated that deploying reprocessing technology in Canada to extract plutonium from used nuclear fuel would be “subject to policy approval” without providing any details of that particular policy. This is a policy vacuum that must be addressed.

Canada adopted an informal ban on reprocessing in the 1970s, but it was never made explicit. Canada should explicitly ban any reprocessing of used nuclear fuel within Canada as a matter of firm public policy.



Prepared by the Nuclear Waste Watch Policy Steering Committee

SUMMARY

In 2019, the International Atomic Energy Agency's Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IAEA-IRRS) urged Canada to update its outdated radioactive waste policy. The IAEA has cautioned that radioactive waste policy should be set by the national government, not by industry.

The Government of Canada agreed. It undertook a consultation process in 2020-2021, and released a draft radioactive waste policy in 2022 for public comment. Natural Resources Canada received thousands of comments proposing improvements to several policy areas. A final decision from the government is pending.

Canada has a longstanding commitment to discourage and – where possible – prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities.

Reprocessing nuclear waste includes the extraction of plutonium, the most widely used primary nuclear explosive material in nuclear weapons. Non-proliferation experts are agreed that ready access to plutonium must be discouraged and prevented wherever possible.

When nuclear explosive materials become available, nation states have a political choice to use such material for civilian or military purposes. Moreover, if such material is stolen or diverted, subnational groups (including criminals and terrorists) can make their own nuclear explosive devices. For this very reason, Canada has already moved to eliminate the availability of weapons-usable uranium (highly enriched uranium) for civilian purposes.

Along with thousands of Canadians commenting on the 2022 draft radioactive waste policy, we urge the Government of Canada to ban any reprocessing of used nuclear fuel for the purpose of extracting plutonium, regardless of its alleged intended use.

RECOMMENDATION

The government of Canada must explicitly ban plutonium reprocessing in Canada.

For questions, or to follow up to schedule discussion, please contact Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director, Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), 416-960-2284 ext. 7219 or email theresa@cela.ca

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