For Immediate Release

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**Critics Call Out Ontario Power Generation on**

**SMR Photo-Op Announcement**

Toronto – Public interest groups say that environment and electricity consumers must be protected from Ontario Power Generation’s (OPG) risky plan to build three prototype “small modular reactors” (SMRs) at the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station.

On Friday, OPG [announced](https://www.opg.com/news-and-media/media-releases/media_release/opg-resumes-planning-activities-for-darlington-new-nuclear/) plans to build three prototype SMRs at the Darlington nuclear station 70 km east of Toronto. Despite the nuclear industry being in [decline](https://thebulletin.org/2020/09/three-takeaways-from-the-2020-world-nuclear-industry-status-report/) in Canada and internationally, OPG hopes that these unproven nuclear reactor designs will be able to overcome the prohibitive costs and risks that have plagued the nuclear industry since the 1960s.

"If these proposed new reactors sound too good to be true, it's because they are. OPG has promised new reactors at Darlington before, but has been unable to deliver in spite of subsidies and protection from their radioactive waste and accident liabilities", commented Shawn-Patrick Stensil, Greenpeace Canada’s Program Director.

For the past several years, the nuclear industry in Canada has been lobbying federal and provincial governments for subsidies and exemptions from environmental assessments to kick start the construction of SMRs in Canada. Last month the federal government handed $20 million over to Terrestrial Energy, one of the three vendors named by OPG on Friday.

Public interest groups are worried more bail outs for the nuclear industry are on the way. The federal government has announced that it will be releasing an “Action Plan” for small modular reactors later this month, and it is widely expected to claim – falsely, according to energy experts – that SMRs will form an important part of Canada’s response to climate change.

“SMRs are a dirty, dangerous distraction from the investments we need in climate action. The [UN has warned](https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12131.doc.htm) we have just 10 years to get climate change and our greenhouse gas emissions under control. Investing in these reactors, which are not even through the design stage and will at most be prototypes over the next decade, doesn’t line up with the ten years we have to act. Even if the other issues of proliferation risk, radioactive waste, and the inherent potential for accidents could be resolved – which is unlikely – SMR development is too slow to address the climate crisis.” said Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director at the Canadian Environmental Law Association

The groups also point out that OPG’s plan for SMRs will create new longer-lived forms of radioactive waste before Canada has even found a long-term and socially acceptable means of managing its existing stockpiles of radioactive waste.

“OPG should focus on resolving the major issues they’re already failing to deal with – growing stockpiles of radioactive wastes and no solid plan in sight for how they will be safely managed in the long term”, commented Brennain Lloyd, from the northern Ontario based group Northwatch.

“SMRs will produce a next generation of radioactive wastes, burdening future generations with more radioactive wastes, more waste types, more reactors, and more contaminated sites.”

These prototype reactors will be allowed to bypass the expert scrutiny and public review that are core elements of an environmental assessment process. In 2012, following a federal environmental assessment that did not specify a reactor design, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission issued OPG a license to prepare the Darlington site for the construction of up to four nuclear reactors. The 2011 EA had considered very general descriptions of four different reactors, none of which reappeared in the list of three reactors OPG announced on Friday. The 2012 license does not name a reactor vendor or design. Because of changes to federal environmental assessment law in 2019, nuclear reactors less than 200MW - or 900 MW if located on an existing nuclear site - do not require an impact assessment. The law does not consider the total nuclear load, so multiple smaller reactors can be built at the same site, such as the experimental SMR designs just announced by OPG, bypassing the environmental impact assessment process.

“The nuclear industry lobbied hard and won – the application of federal environmental assessment law is now restricted, with the passing of the Impact Assessment Act in 2019. The result is that these untested technologies can be brought into use with very little public oversight and expert review” explained Canadian Environmental Law Association’s Northern Services legal counsel Kerrie Blaise.

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**Background**

[Groups say federal funding of new nuclear reactors is a “dirty, dangerous distraction” from tackling climate change](https://cela.ca/dirty-dangerous-new-reactors/), October 20, 2020

[Why the Liberal’s Throne Speech should drop a costly nuclear bailout, Shawn-Patrick Stensil](https://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/story/42336/why-the-liberals-throne-speech-should-drop-a-costly-nuclear-bailout/)  September, 2020

[Small Modular Reactors in Canada: Eroding Public Oversight and Canada’s Transition to Sustainable Development](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6265-347-4_11), Kerrie Blaise and Shawn-Patrick Stensil January 2020

Backgrounder web site: [Small Modular Reactors in Canada](https://stop-smrs.weebly.com/)