



For immediate release
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Canada's new policy on radioactive waste must ban plutonium reprocessing

Ottawa - Today, a national alliance of civil society organizations launched a campaign to formally demand that Canada includes a ban on plutonium reprocessing in its radioactive waste policy.

Canada will release its policy on managing radioactive waste in early 2023. A [draft policy](#) for public comment released in February 2022 says that "deployment of reprocessing technology... is subject to policy approval by the Government of Canada" but does not take a clear position opposing this technology.

Reprocessing is a means of extracting plutonium from nuclear fuel waste. Reprocessing is highly contaminating, practiced in only a few countries, and linked to nuclear weapons proliferation.

Dozens of public interest groups and Indigenous communities participated in the federal radioactive waste policy consultations, and more than 7,000 Canadians submitted letters including a demand that the policy bans reprocessing. In March 2022, Nuclear Waste Watch's Radioactive Waste Review Group released [An Alternative Policy for Canada on Radioactive Waste Management and Decommissioning](#) that forbids plutonium reprocessing.

Commercial plutonium reprocessing has never been carried out in Canada. The limited reprocessing at the federal government's Chalk River Laboratory to supply nuclear weapons material for the American military ended in the 1960s but left a legacy of nuclear contamination in Canada.

Canada has had an [informal ban](#) on reprocessing since the 1970s, following India's testing of its first nuclear weapon made using plutonium from a "peaceful" nuclear reactor, a gift from Canada.

However, the informal ban was breached in 2021 when the federal government granted \$50.5 million to a New Brunswick company, Moltex Energy, to develop its technology to reprocess fuel waste from existing CANDU reactors with the intent of exporting the technology globally. The government also [granted](#) more than \$1.2 billion to Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL) to expand their nuclear research centre at Chalk River to include a laboratory for research that could include plutonium reprocessing.

Yet a 2016 CNL [report](#) found no business case for reprocessing CANDU fuel, in part "due to its low fissile content," and the associated costs and risks. The CNL report also stated that reprocessing would "increase proliferation risk."

That finding about reprocessing and nuclear weapons proliferation is replicated in a [major report](#) released in November 2022 by a U.S. National Academy of Sciences expert panel. The panel reached consensus that the proposed Moltex reprocessing technology does not provide "significant proliferation resistance."

"By reversing its ban on plutonium reprocessing and supporting the development of new reprocessing technology intended for export, Canada seems to be blundering into another dangerous proliferation miscalculation," says Dr. Gordon Edwards, President of the Canadian Coalition on Nuclear Responsibility. Edwards cited the [three letters](#) written to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by U.S. nonproliferation experts warning of the dangers of developing reprocessing technology in Canada.

"Reprocessing intensely radioactive spent fuel presents more opportunities for release of radionuclides than leaving spent fuel in thick metal or concrete casks," says Brennain Lloyd, spokesperson for Northwatch. "Reprocessing does not reduce the need for radioactive waste storage or long-term management. After reprocessing, the remaining material will be in several different waste forms, and the total volume of nuclear waste will have been increased by a factor of 20 or more."

"Are the policy-makers reading the research or only the nuclear industry's sales and promotional materials?" asks Dr. Susan O'Donnell, spokesperson for the Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick. "There is no legitimate reason to support technologies that create the potential for new countries to separate plutonium and develop nuclear weapons. The government should stop supporting this dangerous technology."

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For more information:

The Ban Plutonium Reprocessing campaign website: reprocessing.ca

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BACKGROUND

Additional information about the nuclear waste policy review, visit the Nuclear Waste Watch web pages [HERE](#).

The members of Nuclear Waste Watch Radioactive Waste Review Group who prepared [An Alternative Policy for Canada on Radioactive Waste Management and Decommissioning](#) are:

Dr. Gordon Edwards, Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility

Theresa McClenaghan, Canadian Environmental Law Association

Dr. Susan O'Donnell, Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick

Dr. Ole Hendrickson, Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area

Dr. Michael Poellet, Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Cooperative (ICUCEC)

Brennain Lloyd, Northwatch

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