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Environmental Groups urge International Joint Commission: Reinstate a Nuclear Task Force Now to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes

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Key environmental groups in Canada and the United States, that deal daily with Great Lakes water quality and environmental issues are calling on their respective governments and the International Joint Commission (IJC) on Great Lakes Water Quality to bring back a Nuclear Task Force that will report on nuclear contamination and dangers in the Great Lakes.

The groups that include, among others, the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, Great Lakes United, Sierra Club, the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, and Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes are pressing the IJC to reinstate a Nuclear Task Force that last reported in 1997.

“New potentially calamitous threats to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are now being promoted, including proposals to bury radioactive wastes near the shores of the Great Lakes, and to transport radioactive contaminated materials on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River,” said John Jackson, interim executive director of Great Lakes United. “The International Joint Commission must get involved now to assess existing and potential threats and impacts and to recommend aggressive actions by the Canadian and U.S. Governments.”

“Even the IJC’s earlier reports call for much greater follow up on the many concerns of the first Nuclear Task Force. This still needs to be addressed with the same type of vigour as earlier work by the IJC. This is no time to be lax about radioactive contamination in the Great Lakes, given the aging nuclear reactors we are dealing with on both sides of the border,” said Lorraine Rekmans, of Serpent River First Nation.

“The IJC cannot ignore chronic harms of radio-nuclides from 33 reactors on the shores of the Great Lakes or potentially catastrophic radiological risks such as currently posed by the Lake Erie David-Besse reactor’s severely cracked and degraded shield building and the Lake Michigan Palisades plant’s irradiated water leak,” said attorney Terry Lodge of the Toledo Safe Energy Coalition.

“An IJC Nuclear Task Force should be reinstated to write a special report on nuclear issues as part of the IJC’s 2012-2015 announced priorities including Assessment of Progress Toward Restoring the Great Lakes and Assessing the Capacity to Deliver Great Lakes Science and Information,” said Anabel Dwyer of the Lawyers’ Committee on Nuclear Policy.

Currently, the IJC receives reporting from the national agencies governing nuclear industries, including the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the US, and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Saying that this oversight is too cursory, Gordon Edwards, President of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility is calling for a more comprehensive overview of radioactive threats to water quality.

“The existing nuclear regulatory agencies (NRC and CNSC) cannot be expected to provide the kind of comprehensive and detailed information specific to the Great Lakes. As national agencies, their mandates are much too broad for this type of focus. Risks to water quality are downplayed or overlooked. We have professionals who are currently focused intently on monitoring radioactive releases and assessing risks and impacts that nuclear facilities are having on our water supply. These professionals must be allowed to contribute to IJCs work,” said Edwards.

The various groups have contacted IJC and requested a re-instatement of the Nuclear Task Force. However, IJC, has said that its terms of reference established jointly by the US and Canadian governments.

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