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Oral Presentation

Exposé oral

**Written submission from
Jim Dufresne**

**Mémoire de
Jim Dufresne**

In the Matter of the

À l'égard de

**BWXT Nuclear Energy Canada Inc.,
Toronto and Peterborough Facilities**

**BWXT Nuclear Energy Canada Inc.,
installations de Toronto et Peterborough**

Application for the renewal of the licence for
Toronto and Peterborough facilities

Demande de renouvellement du permis pour les
installations de Toronto et Peterborough

Commission Public Hearing

Audience publique de la Commission

March 2 to 6, 2020

Du 2 au 6 mars 2020

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I, Jim Dufresne, am scared to think about what could happen if the BWXT license is expanded to allow them to manufacture uranium dioxide pellets on the GE-Hitachi property, Monaghan Road, Peterborough Ontario and pray that you will not allow pelleting in Peterborough.

I have been fighting, all my working life, for safe working conditions for the workers at the GE factory on Monaghan Road, Peterborough. Pelleting adds an additional element of danger to the BWXT operation. Pelleting is dangerous for the workers and for everyone living within the dispersion range of the uranium dioxide powder. Uranium dioxide powder, when released into the atmosphere, will accumulate and cause harm to the environment. Peterborough is already known as the “Town of Widows”. Enough is enough!

I was born at home (78 Park Street, Peterborough, two blocks south of the GE factory). I am the oldest of five children. My father left when I was a child and, by the time I was 16, I had to leave school in order to earn money to help my mother. I started working at GE in 1962 and I received a “boy’s wage” of \$1.52 per hours. Boys worked on the night shift. When I turned 18, I received a “man’s wage” of \$2.10 an hour. Between 1962 and 1977, I worked in a lot of different areas of the factory.

I worked in GE Nuclear from 1977 to 2004 and personally experienced very unsafe working conditions. While in Nuclear, I was proud to be elected by my co-workers to serve as their union steward and later, as their chief steward. Over the years, I worked with 175 men and women in Building 21. **Of those 175 GE Nuclear workers, 63 (36%) have now been diagnosed with cancer. Of the 63 diagnosed, 44 (69.8%) have died. The rest of us are struggling.**

In Appendix One is a list of the 63 men and women who worked in GE Nuclear and got cancer. An asterisk marks the names of the 44 men and women who have died. Please look at their names and try to image the pain each man and woman went through. Please look at their names and try to image the pain that their family members live with today.

In 2004, I took early retirement, at age 58. I was sick with prostate cancer. I was also sick of hearing, almost every day, about another of my co-workers getting sick and dying, some of them younger than me. Sick of going to funerals.

Shortly after I retired, Eileen Hughes and Keith Riel started a clinic to help GE workers with work-related illnesses apply for Workers’ Compensation. People were finally starting to speak out about the unusually high numbers of work-related illnesses at GE. **GE Peterborough workers filed 741 WSIB claims.** I started helping the workers and their families file claims and have continued ever since to advocate for them. It has been very hard, very emotional work. Many claims were initially denied and the workers had to go through the long, exhausting and upsetting appeal process to try and get a bit of money to help them cope with their illnesses¹.

¹ This struggle has been carefully researched in a recent study, “Workers’ Fight for Justice: A Retrospective Exposure Profile Study of the GE Factory in Peterborough, Ontario” (Robert DeMatteo and Dale Dematteo, “New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy”, Sage, 2019, 1-29) This struggle has also been documented in the film, “Town of Widows” by Natasha Luckhardt & Rob Viscardis, Canada, 2019, 90 min.

About 350 claims have finally come through but many families have been denied assistance. As I worked with them on their WSIB claims, I was meeting more and more GE workers who had cancer and I have tried to keep track of everyone.

In Appendix Two is a list of 496 GE workers who I know have been diagnosed with cancer. This list includes the 63 workers in the GE Nuclear division. This is not a comprehensive list. This is not a telephone list of names. This list tells a story of pain and loss.

Please look at the list in Appendix Two. Notice that there are clusters of people with the same last names. Peterborough is a small community. These people are related. **Some families have suffered the loss of just one person; some families have lost many family members.** Family members, who were not employed by GE, have also become sick and died. They were exposed to contaminants that were brought home on the clothing, lunch box, boots and cars of GE employees. GE widows want answers and they want justice. It used to be a matter of family pride when a son or daughter followed their father into work at GE. That pride has turned to anger.

On Sunday 26 January 2020, the **documentary “Town of Widows”** will be featured during our weekend film festival “Reframe”. The word is spreading about worker mistreatment at the hands of an indifferent corporation and an inadequate compensation system. I heard a lot of bullshit from GE about how they would protect us. BWXT looks and sounds exactly like GE did. I don’t trust BWXT. A lot of people in town don’t trust BWXT. If pelleting comes to Peterborough, will BWXT be featured in the next documentary?

GE in general, and GE Nuclear in particular, have had a significant role in causing the above average rates of cancer in Peterborough City and County. These higher than average cancer rates are well known. The CNSC/Environmental Protection Review Report (p.38-39) provided the following statistics from the article “The Summary of Selected Cancers in Peterborough County and City 2012.

“The report shows that the incidence of all cancers in both males and females has been increasing in Peterborough during the study period of 1986-2007...Males in Peterborough had significantly higher incidence of lung cancer than Ontario by 6.5% and melanoma by 24.4%...Females in Peterborough have significantly higher incidence of lung cancer (21.9%), melanoma (21.5%) and uterine cancer (14.7%) compared to Ontario...Compared to Ontario, mortality from lung cancer was significantly higher in both Peterborough males (6.6%) and females (14.9%)...Compared to Ontario, the prevalence of male current smokers in Peterborough was lower and prevalence of female current smokers was higher but not significantly.”

Citizens of Peterborough City and County are already suffering from significantly above average rates of cancer. Our hospital, Peterborough Regional Health Center (PRHC), serves more than the city and suburbs and PRHC is struggling to provide health services. Just this week (23 January 2020) PRHC was listed as having the second worst level of overcrowding (“hallway medicine”) in Ontario. We already have a population with higher incidences of cancer and a hospital that is already overcrowded. To bring the risk of another carcinogen, uranium dioxide powder, into this community would be criminal.

GE was a contaminated workplace and the site, now vacated, is still heavily contaminated with many different substances, including PCBs, trichlorethylene, cyanide, lead, asbestos, and acid. Contaminants have been leaching out of the site for a long time. For many years, the employee parking lot on the west side of Monaghan Road was gravel and GE routinely sprayed it with PCB contaminated oil to keep down the dust. Testing showed that PCBs could be found as far down as 15 feet. As partial remediation, GE removed the top 5 feet of soil. This was a high risk job and the workers were requested to wear full haz-mat suits. However, every time it rains, the rainwater flows down the slope, through that contaminated parking lot and into the storm sewers. BWXT seems to be indifferent to this hazard and hosted a community BBQ on the contaminated parking lot.

“The BWXT updated ERA states that there are no pathways for contaminants to enter the groundwater system and no known or suspected groundwater contamination plumes or subsurface contamination, related to BWXT Peterborough operations.”
(CNSC/Environmental Protection Review Report, p.30).

More bullshit! **When GE was built, five drain lines were installed to carry storm water from the GE site directly into Little Lake.** This summer, a “plume” of PCB contaminated industrial oil appeared in Little Lake. Little Lake is the site for our outdoor MusicFest, a series of free, evening concerts that runs twice a week all summer. Musicfest has become a very popular tourist attraction. For every concert, hundreds of families sit on the grass around the outdoor amphitheatre and enjoy the music. Peterborough Marina is on Little Lake. Swimming and fishing is permitted in Little Lake. Beavermead Park and Campground are on the east shore of Little Lake. Contaminants from the GE site have already gotten into Little Lake. If there is an “unplanned event” with uranium dioxide powder, BWXT contaminants have a direct, man-made route straight into Little Lake.

I was in the tack and brazier room when a major accident occurred and I saw firsthand how poorly it was handled

One evening in the late 1980s, a brazier exploded in the beryllium room. A new employee was being trained on the operation of the brazier. I was working on the other brazier and had my back to him so I don't know exactly what happened. Suddenly there was an explosion. The top of the brazier flew off and beryllium was ejected into the room. The alarm went off. There were about 55 men and women working at the time. I got everyone outside on the lawn and called the Ministry of Labour (M.O.L.). The security guard called the manager, who was at home in Westwood (15 miles away) having dinner. It was an evening shift and there was no night foreman. It took two days to clean the room and then the M.O.L. declared the room clean. Craig McDowall, a technician, was working next door in the clean room. For a full 12-hour shift he watched as the room was being cleaned; his counterpart on the next 12-hour shift did the same thing. When the M.O.L. declared that the room was clean, Craig called me into the clean room and said that they had not ‘swiped’ the top of the brazier. I told the M.O.L. that the room was not clean. He said that if we did not go back to work we would be suspended. We still refused. Then I said that he and I had to inspect the brazier. We put on cotton lab coats and cloth gloves; this was the only protective clothing that we wore in the tack and brazier room. We did not wear masks. With his glove I reached up and brought down a handful of beryllium powder from the top of the brazier. It took them the rest of the day to finish cleaning the room. Even though I was right, we were suspended; we grieved the suspension and won.

How does the brazier accident relate to the BWXT Renewal Application?

- Accidents happen, perhaps because an employee is not properly trained, as happened with the brazier, or perhaps because workers are being pushed to work at unsafe rates. Recently, there is a rumour circulating in Peterborough that beryllium was found in the clean room at BWXT. Are BWXT workers not adequately trained? Are they being pushed to work too fast?
- As we have recently learned from the false alarm at Pickering, crucial steps in nuclear safety may be in the hands of a very junior employee.
- Nuclear workers know that their lives are on the line every minute of every day. They understand the risks and care about safety. The burden of enforcing safety measures should not fall on front line workers.
- Management personnel are physically removed from immediate risk and they are quick to say that the workplace is safe but they are not the ones who have to handle or be exposed to the hazardous materials.

Why I am opposed to licensing BWXT to pellet in Peterborough

- The physical site already has an unacceptably high toxic burden. The stockpiling of large amounts of uranium dioxide powder and liquid hydrogen on site increases the risk of more physical contamination. The factory is on the side of a hill; rainfall will always run downhill, into the sewers and into Little Lake.
- Hundreds of Peterborough workers have already been subjected to dangerous levels of industrial contaminants and have contracted life-threatening, work-related illnesses.
- Hundreds of Peterborough families are mourning the loss of one or more family members.
- I sat with Betty Outwater as she was dying. We worked together for a long time. Our kids played together. I held her hand and gave her a kiss on her forehead. I said goodbye. It takes a little piece right out of your heart.

Employers buy our labour, not our lives.

They do not have the right to put our lives at risk.

They do not have the right to put the lives of vulnerable children in the community at risk.

They do not have the right to contaminate our community.

NO PELLETING IN PETERBOROUGH

Appendices One and Two not included (personal information).