



PHYSICIANS FOR GLOBAL SURVIVAL
MÉDECINS POUR LA SURVIE MONDIALE
CANADA

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Physicians call for a moratorium on nuclear power

With its United States affiliate, Physicians for Global Survival today called for a moratorium on new nuclear reactors in Canada and a suspension of operations at the nuclear reactors on fault lines. PGS cited the medical risks associated with radiation exposure and stressed that, unlike x-rays which expose a person for a limited time, radioactive emissions from nuclear power plants expose entire populations and are the “gifts that keep on giving”.

“There is no safe level of radiation exposure,” said Michael Dworkind, MD, immediate past president of Physicians for Global Survival. “Only recently scientists discovered that background natural radon was responsible for an estimated 20% of lung cancers in Canadians; the same scientists estimate that 20% of childhood leukaemia occur as a result of exposure to natural radiation.” “We cannot continue to expose human populations to increased radiation from nuclear power plants,” he said.

“Human fallibility being what it is, the only way to avoid nuclear accidents is to not build nuclear reactors,” said Dr. Birkett, a long time member of the board of Physicians for Global Survival.

According to the US National Academy of Sciences, any exposure to radiation increases a person's risk of developing cancer. In the case of the Japanese Fukushima reactors, the primary radionuclides of concern are:

Tritium, which is indistinguishable from hydrogen as far as biological systems are concerned and can be incorporated into every cell of a body.

Iodine-131, which causes thyroid cancer when absorbed through inhalation and ingestion.

Cesium-137, which behaves like potassium and when ingested spreads throughout the body. At Chernobyl, Cesium-137 was taken up by lichen and plants, and animals that consumed those plants became radioactive.

Strontium-90, which is deposited in bone and teeth where it remains for decades; it causes bone cancer and leukaemia.

Plutonium-239, which causes lung cancer and remains a severe threat for thousands of years.



Cesium-137 and Iodine-131 are fairly easy to measure and were used to mark the extent of the Chernobyl radiation contamination, but, in fact, there are more than 47 radioactive elements being released during the Fukushima disaster. Physicians are concerned that external radiation exposure does not adequately account for the effects of internal emitters.

Medical treatment for radiation exposure is limited, at best. Iodine pills provide only limited protection against the absorption of Iodine-131, mostly in children. It does not offer protection against gamma irradiation from Iodine-131.

The public health risk from a large radioactive release from Canadian reactors near densely populated areas around Toronto is substantial.

Physicians for Global Survival is also deeply concerned about the financial effects of an accident at a Canadian nuclear power plant because the federal government would be liable for the environmental and human costs.

Physicians for Global Survival applauds the increased safety measures that have been taken by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission but maintains that nuclear power cannot be made completely safe. "Clean renewable energy is the only sustainable option" said Dr. Richard Denton, President.

Physicians for Global Survival calls upon the Government of Canada and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to:

- Implement a moratorium on new nuclear reactor licensing and design certification without delay.
- Suspend operations at nuclear reactors on fault lines while a safety review is conducted.
- Establish a rolling stewardship for spent fuel pools and onsite fuel and waste storage for all reactors which will engage the expertise of current operators for their lifetimes and that of their successors for generations.
- Eliminate subsidies for new reactors, especially loan guarantees, and prioritize safe, clean renewable energy sources that can meet today's energy needs.

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