

News release

GREENPEACE

Anti-radiation pill distribution should meet international best practices

9 December 2015 (Toronto) – Today environmental groups asked Health Minister Eric Hoskins to expand on the distribution of potassium iodide (KI) pill to meet international best practices and the cancer risks highlighted by real world nuclear accidents.

Taken shortly after a nuclear accident, a KI pill can reduce the risk of thyroid cancer. Earlier this fall, KI pills were distributed for the first time to all residents within 10 km of the Pickering, Bruce and Darlington nuclear stations. The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and Greenpeace filed a request under Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) to undertake an evidence-based review of current KI distribution policy. The ministry has three months to respond.

“Real-world experience and international best practices suggest Ontario's nuclear emergency plans aren't sufficient to protect Ontarians in the event of a nuclear accident, said Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director of the CELA. “We're asking Minister Hoskins to ensure public safety through a transparent evidence-based review.”

The environmental groups made this request because they say the Ontario government has been dodging its responsibility to update its offsite nuclear emergency plans since the Fukushima disaster. They note that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) required the distribution of KI within Ontario's 10 km nuclear emergency plan zones in 2014 because it was impatient with provincial inaction since Fukushima.

“The federal regulator stepped into the provincial realm because it felt Ontario was avoiding its responsibility to protect the public in the event of a nuclear accident,” said Shawn-Patrick Stensil, a senior energy analyst with Greenpeace. “It is imperative for the Wynne government to ensure best-in-class nuclear emergency plans if it proposes to continue relying on nuclear power despite the costs and risks.”

The government announced last week it would spend billions to rebuild and extend operational lives of the Bruce and Darlington nuclear stations.

In their EBR application, the groups cite the lack of evidence supporting Ontario's current KI distribution policy, and note that even a CNSC Commissioner called the 10 km distribution a "minimum". They further note that Switzerland decided to distribute KI to every home within 50 km of a nuclear plant after an evidence-based policy review.

Last week, the City of Toronto's Executive Committee requested city staff report back on whether Toronto should endorse the expanded KI distribution.

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