May 14, 2007

City of Hamilton Councillors
c/o Clerk’s office
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Fax: 905-546-2095.

To Whom It May Concern:

The David Suzuki Foundation would like to support Councillor Brad Clark’s motion calling for a moratorium on construction of nuclear power plants, including objections to nearby construction that would impact residents of Hamilton. This motion should help protect the residents from potential dangers stemming from nuclear energy production.

Nuclear power is experiencing a revival thanks to growing concerns about climate change. The nuclear industry has reinvented itself as an environmentally friendly option, producing electricity without the air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions of coal, oil or gas.

But a closer look reveals nuclear power is not an environmentally or financially viable option. Nuclear power creates radioactive waste and there is no accepted method of managing that waste. It is also prohibitively expensive. The last plant constructed in Ontario – Darlington – was billions of dollars over budget when it was completed in the mid-1980s.

Whatever benefits nuclear technology may provide through decreased air pollutants are more than made up for by large and unresolved environmental problems. As of 2000, Canada has 35,000 tonnes of highly radioactive nuclear waste, with nowhere to put it. With a radioactive half-life of 25,000 years, nuclear waste remains dangerous for 250,000 years.

As well, mining uranium for nuclear power is extremely energy-intensive, meaning that nuclear power is in fact a considerable source of greenhouse gases. Furthermore, routine releases and accidental spills of contaminated water from mining operations have poisoned major fisheries and threatened the health of local communities.

There are many safety issues surrounding nuclear power, especially as power plants age. Nuclear plants routinely emit radioactive material, imposing cancer risks on its workers, their children, and people in surrounding communities. Power plants can also leak other hazardous materials. For example, Pickering reactor #4 had a heavy water leak in April 1996 that released radioactive tritium into Lake Ontario, contaminating drinking water supplies.
Between 1956 and 2000, Canada's state-owned Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) received subsidies totalling $16.6 billion. Even with these subsidies, nuclear power is far more expensive than both fossil fuels and renewables.

The last 20 reactors built in the U.S. had an average cost of $5,000 per kilowatt of capacity; the last one built in Canada cost $4,000 per kilowatt. Compare these prices to the current prices for large-scale wind power and natural gas plants, currently at $1,200 and $1,000 per kilowatt respectively.

The figures for nuclear do not include related costs to society from environmental and health damage, or the costs of accidents, clean up, waste disposal or plant decommissioning. And nuclear plants are not only expensive, they're also financially risky because of their long lead times, huge cost overruns, and open-ended liabilities.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

Morag Carter
Director, Climate Change Program

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