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Group wants nuclear station refurbishment halted

Point Lepreau's power isn't clean, cheap or needed in N.B., protesters say

Greg Weston

FREDERICTON - A coalition of environmental associations has joined forces against nuclear power in New Brunswick in the hopes of influencing the energy debate during the provincial election campaign.

The group wants to dispel what it calls the three myths about electricity produced at the Point Lepreau nuclear station: that it's clean, cheap and required to meet energy demands.

"With this provincial election, New Brunswick stands at a crossroads," Gretchen Fitzgerald of the Sierra Club Atlantic said at a news conference at the Conservation Council of New Brunswick's headquarters in Fredericton.

"At this phase in the refurbishment process at Point Lepreau, we are also at the right juncture to turn repair into shutdown. Not only will this make New Brunswick safer, it will also save money."

If the refurbishment was to be halted, the groups says that would prevent the province's reliance on nuclear energy in the future and free up funds that could be invested in renewable energy sources.

Willie Nolan of the International Institution of Concern for Public Health said the political parties need to address the nuclear question during the campaign.

"I hope they'll look at the debt of this province," she said.

"Lepreau is only contributing to that. It's only increasing and we don't see an end in sight. I'm hoping that the politicians will be brave enough to say 'No, that's enough.'"

Nolan went through the three myths to explain the group's position on nuclear power, starting with its emissions.

She pointed to a recent decision from Advertising Standards Canada, a non-profit industry group that self-regulates advertising, that called it misleading to say CANDU reactors are emission-free.

"It is well-established that CANDU reactors, such as those at Point Lepreau, actually expose workers and the public to many harmful substances," while creating various indirect environmental issues, she said.

"The mining, transportation, processing and construction required to operate nuclear power plants all contribute to greenhouse gas emissions."

Logan said nuclear energy isn't as affordable as it is regularly portrayed, especially given the costs of construction, uranium mining and long-term storage of nuclear waste.

The final point was that New Brunswick requires the electricity produced at Point Lepreau.

"The reactor has been shut down for two years at this juncture and there have been no power shortages. We now pay less for replacement power than we will for the full cost of electricity from a refurbished Point Lepreau," Nolan said, pouring cold water on the idea of building a second reactor at the facility.

"Nuclear power plants take at least 10 years before producing any electricity. On the other hand,

renewable energy and co-generation can be deployed in a couple of years."

David Thompson, the Fundy Baykeeper, said the refurbishment project shouldn't have gone ahead after the Public Utilities Board advised the previous Progressive Conservative government against it, adding that the current Liberal government also supported the plan.

"Both have been complicit in bringing New Brunswick to the situation it is in," he said.

"In terms of dollars, that this is the biggest thing on the table in New Brunswick. It eclipses any other issue financially in this province."

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