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Boosting small dirty nuclear: Unproven recipe for more financial loss

“SMRs [Small Modular Nuclear Reactors] can provide reliable and emission-free energy while creating jobs, economic growth and export opportunities. Our opportunity to be a leader in this technology and showcase Ontario’s nuclear expertise to the world is right now.”

– Todd Smith, Ontario Minister of Energy, Dec 2, 2021.

In late 2021 Ontario Power Generation announced that it would team with US-based GE Hitachi to build Canada’s first Small Modular Reactor at the Darlington Nuclear Site on Lake Ontario.

The Ontario government has been an enthusiastic ally in the federal Liberal plan to promote SMRs as a solution to climate breakdown.¹ SMRs would be manufactured at a source site like Darlington and then transported for assembly at a distant site to generate power. Ottawa hopes to place dozens of these untested nuclear energy plants across the Canadian north while developing an export market.

What Ford claims

Ford and his ministers claim that small nuclear reactors will be:

- cheaper and quicker to build than typical nuclear reactors;
- small enough to be mobile, and able to power Indigenous and remote communities or mining projects;
- an alternative to energy sources with high GHG emissions, like coal and diesel;
- marketed by Ottawa for worldwide export, to the benefit of the Ontario economy.²



¹ “Is Canada betting big on small nuclear reactors? Here’s what you need to know,” *The Narwhal*, January 4, 2021

² “Feasibility of Small Modular Reactor, Development and Deployment in Canada, Executive Summary,” prepared by Ontario Power Generation, Bruce Power, NB Power and SaskPower, March 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/small-modular-reactor-feasibility-report>



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The Reality

SMR problems far outweigh benefit claims because:

- they will add to the threats and costs of radioactive nuclear waste, with its difficult, unsolved problems that will need to be managed for at least a thousand years;
- they will multiply the nuclear weapon proliferation risk of all nuclear reactors;
- the mining of their uranium fuel in Saskatchewan will heavily affect Indigenous communities and natural environments;
- they are an untested technology, especially in remote settings;
- the costs of SMRs, like those of large nuclear reactors, will be greater than ever-cheaper renewable alternatives. The cost of the joint SMR investment plan of New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan is \$27 billion;³

- they will arrive too late to replace GHG emissions that need to be cut immediately;
- there is little support for their use in Indigenous communities. In June 2019, the Anishinabek Chiefs-in-Assembly representing 40 First Nations across Ontario unanimously opposed “any effort to situate SMRs within our territory.”⁴

The Ford government’s SMR plan for Ontario trades the known environmental and social costs of the nuclear industry for the unknown benefits of an international nuclear energy market -- all with no proven contribution to ending the climate emergency.

The People and Climate First Alternative

- **Renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power can do a cheaper, quicker and better job without contributing to the known impact and risks of nuclear energy.**

³ “Greens condemn plan to spend \$27 billion on nuclear reactors,” Green Party of Canada, December 3, 2019.

⁴ “Mini-Nukes, Big Bucks: The Interests Behind the SMR Push,” Joyce Nelson, *Watershed Sentinel*, January 14, 2021. (<https://watershedsentinel.ca/articles/mini-nukes-big-bucks-the-money-behind-small-modular-reactors/>)