

# Liquid Nuclear Waste Convoys

## A Threat to the Waters of the Great Lakes

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For Immediate Release

Over two dozen non-governmental organizations from Canada and the United States are asking Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Barack Obama to postpone or cancel an unprecedented series of shipments of highly radioactive liquid waste from Ontario to South Carolina along public roads and over bridges crossing the waters of the Great Lakes.

The groups are demanding that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be produced, published and circulated, to allow for scrutiny from other government departments and the public in both countries. In addition, the groups are insisting that proper notification be disseminated through the **Great Lakes Executive Committee (GLEC)** to federal agencies, state and provincial governments, tribal governments, First Nations, Métis, municipal governments, watershed management agencies, and local public agencies, as required under the terms of the **2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA)**.

The **Great Lakes Commission** and **International Joint Commission** are meeting in Toronto this week. “There is enough time for the governments to fulfill their duties under the Great Lakes 2012 Agreement and to respond to the demands of Sierra Club and dozens of other environmental groups to prepare and circulate an independent and meaningful Environmental Impact Statement that considers alternatives to this risky proposal,” said Christine Elwell, Green Energy Campaign, **Sierra Club Canada Foundation**.

A lawsuit was recently launched in U.S. federal court calling for an injunction against the proposed shipments. On September 20, 2016, the **U.S. Department of Energy** stated on the record of the suit that it was withholding shipments until after February 17, 2017, “in order to ensure compliance with all legal and contractual obligations” – in other words, until the federal judge has had the opportunity to rule on the merits of the lawsuit.

The liquid in question is now stored in a large double-walled tank called **FISST** (Fissile Solutions Storage Tank) at Chalk River, Ontario, containing 23 000 litres (6000 gallons) of an intensely radioactive and highly dangerous acidic solution. **FISST** holds a bewildering variety of radionuclides that are created when uranium is irradiated in a reactor. The liquid also contains a quantity of weapons-grade Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) – essentially the same material as the nuclear explosive that was used in the Hiroshima Bomb.

“Nuclear authorities in both countries have disguised the true nature of this liquid waste by calling it *Highly Enriched Uranyl Nitrate Liquid (HEUNL)*” said Dr. Gordon Edwards, President of the **Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility**. “In fact uranyl nitrate is only one of dozens of radioactive compounds in the liquid, and that liquid is more than 17,000 times more radioactive than the uranyl nitrate alone. Such high-level radioactive liquid has never before been transported over public roads anywhere in North America.”

There are safer, faster and cheaper ways of dealing with the waste that have already been used in Canada and elsewhere, such as solidification and down-blending. “There are 20 other tanks of liquid radioactive waste at Chalk River, whose contents are being solidified and stored on-site as solid waste,” said Dr. Ole Hendrickson of the **Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County**. “Moreover, since 2003, the liquid waste that would have previously gone into the FISST tank has been routinely solidified, and up until 2011, Chalk River Laboratories was committed to solidifying the liquid contents of the **FISST** tank as well.”

Plans call for 100 to 150 truckloads of liquid waste over a period of several years, from Chalk River, Ontario, to the US Department of Energy’s **Savannah River Site** in South Carolina, along secret routes with heavily armed guards. The ostensible purpose is to “repatriate” the US-origin weapons-grade uranium to avoid any chance of its use in nuclear weapons, according to a program launched by President Obama in 2009. However, it was never originally intended to ship the material in liquid form

Tom Clements, Director of **Savannah River Site Watch** in South Carolina, observed that “The safest and cheapest way to address proliferation concerns is to eliminate the weapons-grade uranium at Chalk River by down-blending it, leaving only low enriched uranium (LEU), which is not nuclear-weapons-usable material. In February 2016, Indonesia was given permission to down-blend its stock of US-origin liquid weapons-grade uranium, thereby eliminating any need to transport the material back to the USA. The same can be done with the Chalk River liquid waste, as was explicitly delineated by Canadian authorities in 2011.” The Indonesian down-blending operation is already completed, just a few months after **US Department of Energy** permission was given.

The Niagara councillors are unanimously opposed to these shipments coming through the Niagara region. Gracia Janes, from Niagara-on-the-Lake, is the Environment Coordinator of the **National Council of Women of Canada**. She pointed out “our regional councillors represent close to 500,000 people. Being on the edge of Lake Ontario and the Niagara River, with the unique tender fruit lands growing the best peaches in Canada, if not North America, we are very conscious of what an accident and liquid spill would mean.”

Janet McNeill of **Durham Nuclear Awareness** added, “Our governments must do as the Regional Municipality of Niagara Region has done: take the time to examine all the facts very carefully, put this plan under a microscope that involves investigating alternatives, and do all that in an open process, involving the public, and not under the sole jurisdiction of the nuclear industry and its all-too-compliant regulator, so that we can trust that the risks involved and the alternatives available are being fully examined & properly investigated.”

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