

# FIVE REASONS TO OPPOSE URANIUM MINING AND EXPLORATION

By Angela Giles

**U**ranium mining companies have shown a renewed interest in uranium deposits across Canada in the past year. In addition to being the principal fuel for nuclear reactors, uranium is the main raw material for nuclear weapons, while small quantities are used for medical isotopes. The industry claims that nuclear power is a “clean, green energy.” But before jumping on the nuclear bandwagon, there are clear health and environmental risks that should be considered.

Here are five reasons to oppose uranium mining and exploration:

## 1. THERE IS NO SAFE STORAGE OPTION FOR WASTE.

Uranium mining and milling leave behind dozens of toxic and radioactive components (uranium naturally produces highly dangerous radioactive by-products like radium, radon gas and polonium.) Common methods of waste storage have been vulnerable to seepage and spontaneous containment failure, not to mention earthquakes and other natural and man-made disasters. No storage method has been accident-free to date; in fact, the largest radiation release in human history after Chernobyl was the sudden collapse of a uranium tailings dam in Churchrock, New Mexico, in 1979. Radioactive for thousands of years, the uranium waste leaves a toxic legacy for generations.

## 2. MINING POSES SERIOUS HEALTH RISKS.

Although technologies protecting miners have improved, mine workers' health is still seriously at risk. Communities



Uranium is used to generate power in nuclear reactors. Uranium also provides the fissile material for nuclear weapons.

in at least a 100-km radius (and as far as 1,000 km) are impacted by uranium dust particles, and more importantly by radon gas, a known cancer-causing agent. Countless studies in areas around uranium mines have confirmed higher rates of radiation-induced lung cancer (in smokers and non-smokers alike), and a number of studies have linked radon gas to an increase in childhood leukemia and other diseases.

## 3. URANIUM MINING POISONS WATER SOURCES.

Groundwater can be impacted by the simple act of drilling, which can force the movement of uranium ore and release radon and other radioactive materials into our drinking water. The by-products of uranium in the waste also leach into nearby watersheds and ecosystems, contaminating them forever. Solid radioactive fallout gets into the food chain through contaminated soil, fish and animals, increasing the likelihood of disease in living creatures.

## 4. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “CLEAN” NUCLEAR POWER.

Although the actual use of uranium in a nuclear power plant is low in carbon emissions, everything else relating to nuclear power is very carbon-intensive:

the mining and milling of uranium, the enrichment of uranium, and the building (and dismantling) of nuclear reactors. In addition, the by-products of nuclear waste and the hazards they pose are significantly worse than carbon emissions.

## 5. THE PUSH FOR URANIUM MINING IS PART OF THE U.S. ENERGY INTEGRATION AGENDA

Canada is the world's largest producer of uranium. About 80 per cent of uranium mined in Canada is exported, and a substantial portion of this is used for nuclear power production in the United States. As demand for uranium ore increases in the United States and around the world, there will be more pressure on governments to allow companies to mine it. The Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) calls for increased integration of energy markets in Canada, the United States and Mexico, and harmonized rules and regulations (with a resultant weakening of social and environmental policies) to meet these growing energy demands.

The short-term economic benefits uranium mining may produce do not outweigh the long-term devastation it brings to the environment, local waterways and people's health.

The Council of Canadians calls on governments to enact legislation to permanently ban uranium mining and exploration in Canada.

For more information about the Council's energy campaign, visit [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org) or call us at 1-800-387-7177.

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