

Medical isotope future in doubt

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The Manitoban

CHALK RIVER (CUP) — Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced in June that Canada would not extend its commitment to producing medical isotopes at the National Research Universal (NRU) reactor at the Chalk River facility beyond 2016.

The announcement has put the spotlight on the medical isotope industry and called its apparent fragility into question.

Medical isotopes such as Cobalt-60 produced by reactors like the NRU are used often for both treatment and diagnosis. The injection of medical isotopes into the body can help doctors diagnose heart disease, cancer and even provide high-resolution images of bones that can be superior to X-rays. Used for treatment, the energy given off by the isotopes can be directed toward cancer cells, killing them.

The Chalk River NRU reactor has become a major global supplier of medical isotopes, providing an estimated 60 per cent of the world's isotope needs, and can produce enough material to treat 76,000 people per day.

The facility was set to be decommissioned in 2005 and replaced by two new reactors. However, despite 12 years of continuous development, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) announced in May 2008 that the development of the new reactors would be abandoned due to uncorrectable design flaws.

After this failure, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) renewed the NRU reactor's license in 2006 on the condition that the reac-



(ALMOST) ALL USED UP The Chalk River Facility is on its last leg of operations.

tor underwent upgrades to ensure the integrity of the cooling system. In November 2007, the reactor was shut down to perform the upgrades; however the work took longer than expected, creating a global shortage of medical isotopes.

On December 17, 2007, against recommendations of the head of the CNSC Linda Keen, the government of Canada opted to restart the NRU reactor to satisfy global demand and a shortage of medical isotopes. At the time, Keen commented that the risk of an accident occurring at Chalk River was "1,000 times greater than international standards."

Keen's disagreement with Gary Lunn, the federal minister of Natural Resources at the time, over the safety of the Chalk River facility led to her dismissal in January 2008. Since then, the opposition parties have raised questions about the motivation behind her firing and government interference in regulatory bodies such as the CNSC.

In May 2009 Chalk River's NRU reactor was shut down again as a

safety precaution during power outages in Eastern Ontario and Quebec. Following the shutdown, heavy water was found leaking from a corroded spot on the reactor, prompting the AECL to keep the reactor offline for three months while repairs were carried out.

Due to their reactivity, nuclear isotopes have a short shelf-life, so the current shutdown of the NRU reactor has created the potential for another international isotope shortage.

Harper said on June 17 that the Canadian government would seek to extend the license of Chalk River's NRU reactor beyond 2011 to 2016, but that Canada may look to get out of the medical isotope business following its decommission. Currently no new reactors have been commissioned.

With aging production facilities, the planned shutdown of the NRU reactor and no new reactors on the horizon, practitioners and patients of nuclear medicine have reason to be concerned until a long-term solution to the shortage is found.

Author challenges common view of Canadian history

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SASKATOON (CUP) — Yves Engler has laid out a difficult task for himself. Although most Canadians believe Canada's foreign policy is built on peacekeeping and resolving conflicts, Engler is out to disprove such notions.

Engler's third book, *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy*, recounts the many instances when Canada fell short of its peaceful image abroad.

The shocking charges in the book include Canada's failed attempt to establish colonies in the Caribbean after WWI, tacit support for the apartheid regime of South Africa, and helping to establish the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

Engler also asserts that former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson might be considered a war criminal for his diplomatic role during the Vietnam War. Pearson, who is the father of Canada's peacekeeping image, is often remembered as being against the Vietnam War, but Engler believes his slight disagreement about the conduct of the war has been mythologized into an anti-war view Pearson didn't actually hold.

"If you take courses in Canadian university about foreign policy, you don't, in my opinion, get a very good understanding about the true history of Canada's role in the world."

Engler says there is a "soft nationalism" in schools that is further propagated by the media that assumes an unquestioning look at Canada's actions internationally.

"I think it's obviously systemic in

that basically all powerful institutions support the mythology in one way or another," he said.

Ultimately it was events in Haiti that inspired the writing of *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy*. In 2004, a struggle erupted between Haiti's democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and opposition forces. According to Aristide, he was forced from power by the American, French, and Canadian governments for a more compliant government. Canadian officials dispute this claim.

"There was just too much evidence that Canadian politicians, police trainers, military, et cetera, knew what they were doing [...] The reality was a horrible devastation to the most impoverished nation in the hemisphere," said Engler, who has travelled to Haiti.

Inspired to expose the truth about Canada's involvement in Haiti, Engler co-wrote *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority*. However, when Engler tried to present his findings to fellow Canadians he was often met with skepticism. This led Engler to dig deeper in his latest book.

The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy attacks almost everything most patriotic Canadians hold sacred: Canada's peacekeeping image, standing up to American power, and foreign aid that supposedly helps the developing world. Engler disputes critics who might claim he is unpatriotic or that he hates Canada.

"I played junior hockey, I'm bilingual, and I wrote most of the book at Tim Hortons. I think that gives me pretty good Canadian credentials."

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