

SRB Technologies seeks approval from nuclear safety commission

It is an area in which AECL has research facilities and the original Canadian reactor

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A Pembroke, Ont., company that wants to dilute radioactive water through the city sewer system and the Ottawa River is applying to have its operating licence renewed.

On Wednesday, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission held a public licence renewal hearing in Ottawa for SRB Technologies, whose operating licence expires on Nov. 30.

The company presented its plans to reduce the radioactive groundwater contamination that caused the commission to shut it down temporarily in August.

At the time, nuclear safety inspectors found groundwater around the facility, which is about 130 kilometres northwest of Ottawa, was contaminated with radioactivity levels up to 80 times higher than what is considered safe.

Inspectors and company officials believe rainwashes radioactive material off the company's smokestacks, allowing it to flow into nearby waterways.

The contamination comes from the radioactive tritium — an isotope of hydrogen gas — that the company uses to make glow-in-the-dark signs and emergency markers.

Company officials told the hearing that the company plans to renovate the roof of the facility to reduce the amount of uncontrolled radioactive runoff.

They also plan to collect the contaminated rainwater and discharge it periodically into the Ottawa River through the Pembroke city sewer system in order to dilute it to safe levels.

According to calculations in the company's plan, the contaminated water collected must be diluted 300 times in order to meet safe radioactivity levels specified by drinking water guidelines.

The plan says the water will be diluted to those levels if it mixes with 40 per cent of the daily volume of sewage that passes through Pembroke's sewer system and will be diluted even more when it reaches the river.

Ole Hendrickson spoke at the hearing on behalf of Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County, a Pembroke-area environmental group.

He said the plan to flush contaminated water into the Ottawa River is a bad idea considering it is the source of drinking water for communities along the river's length, including Ottawa. Hendrickson said the facility should be shut down, as it is too close to where people live.

"It's clearly not in the right place for a major radiation processing facility," he said, adding that the company's pollution prevention standards are outdated. "We're in the 21st century now and we should have 21st-century facilities."