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August 23, 1994

The Honourable Bud Wildman
Ontario Minister of Environment and Energy
135 St. Clair Avenue West
Toronto, ON M4V 1P5

Dear Mr. Wildman:

I am writing to you on Energy Probe's behalf, concerning the issue of the maximum tolerable levels of tritium in drinking water, addressed by the May 27th report from your Advisory Committee on Environmental Standards (ACES), entitled *A Standard for Tritium*. When you released that report, you indicated that you were taking the report under advisement and would make a decision in the fall. These comments are intended to assist you in making that very important decision.

We have already forwarded to you, for your convenience, the submissions Energy Probe made to ACES in the course of the deliberations that led to their report. As you can see from them, the Advisory Committee, in its report, essentially adopted all of Energy Probe's recommendations. You will also find that many of that report's findings and claims are clearly documented in Energy Probe's submissions -- including the 300-page collection of documentary evidence we assembled for the Demand/Supply Hearing, which we also submitted to ACES, and have forwarded to you as well. We hope you will find this level of detail and documentation helpful. I would be pleased to answer any questions you, your staff, or your Ministry's staff may have.

Our detailed submission today will concentrate on the two broad questions you must answer in making your decision:

1. Is the level of public-health protection suggested in the ACES report appropriate? Bluntly put, did ACES "go too far"?
2. Are the socio-economic impacts of adopting ACES's recommendations -- for an immediate 100 Bq/L Drinking Water Objective for tritium, and a 20 Bq/L Drinking Water Objective for tritium over the next five years, and for their treatment as Maximum Acceptable Concentrations -- onerous enough to justify compromising those recommendations? Should we tolerate higher tritium levels, and cancer risks, because it's too hard and expensive to meet the ACES recommendations?

As you can see from our attached detailed submission, it is Energy Probe's position that the ACES recommendations flow inevitably from a simple application of the best scientific
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information to your Ministry's policies. More specifically, ACES applied the best scientific information about the cancer risk of radioactive pollutants like tritium, to your Ministry's policies on the acceptable cancer risk from carcinogenic pollutants in Ontario drinking water.

Far from going too far, we believe that ACES could well have gone farther, and that you should seriously consider doing so.

Specifically, information more recent than the ACES inquiry, or otherwise not made available to ACES, suggest that the risk to the public from tritium may warrant even greater exposure reductions.

Our submission also addresses specifically some claims and arguments which we know you and your staff are receiving from opponents of tighter tritium standards.

Concerning the socio-economic impacts of adopting ACES's recommendations, Energy Probe agrees with the ACES report that the Ontario Drinking Water Objective should immediately be set at 100 Bq/L, and that public discussions should begin immediately on the least-cost means of attaining the more stringent ODWO of 20 Bq/L, as well as further reductions toward zero emissions.

Energy Probe is also concerned that you and your Ministry staff appear to be addressing these socio-economic impacts in a relatively closed process, despite your Ministry staff's acknowledged lack of information and expertise on this topic. While we acknowledge that Ontario Hydro and Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (the only two major tritium polluters of drinking water in Ontario) own the tritium-emitting facilities and therefore have the best access to the data on the costs of emissions reduction, we have found that their estimates and forecasts, unless tested by open publication, expert cross-examination, and opposing expertise, are extremely unreliable, to say the least. We urge you not to make any official decision on the socio-economic impacts of attaining an ODWO of 20 Bq/L without establishing a process of airing and testing those cost estimates and forecasts, and we recommend a specific process.

We hope you and your staff will give these comments due consideration, and we look forward to your decision on this important issue. We would be pleased to meet with you or your staff to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

Norman Rubin
Director, Nuclear Research
and Senior Policy Analyst

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cc: Beverly Thorpe, Standards Development Branch, MOEE
135 St. Clair Avenue W., Toronto, ON M4V 1P5