

MEDIA ADVISORY

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

MEAFORD GROUP CALLS ON DEFENCE MINISTER TO HALT WORK ON SO-CALLED “GREEN” ENERGY SCHEME AT CONTAMINATED ARMY BASE *DISTURBANCE OF TOXINS COULD HARM RESIDENTS AND GEORGIAN BAY*

April 22, 2024

MEAFORD, ON: Save Georgian Bay, a grassroots advocacy group, has issued an urgent request to Defence Minister Bill Blair to halt all preliminary work on TC Energy’s proposed Pumped Storage Project at a military training base in Meaford that is littered with unexploded munitions and toxic chemicals. Any further pre-construction activities could increase the dangers from that contamination, posing serious threats to the health and water supply of the local community and to Georgian Bay itself, the source of drinking water for tens of thousands around its shores.

TC Energy’s plan requires the excavation of a 375-acre reservoir on the 4th Canadian Division Training Centre, known locally as the Meaford Tank Range, where decades of live-fire weapons’ training have left a documented legacy of exploded and unexploded ordnance (UXOs), heavy metals and toxic chemicals.

So contaminated is the base that nearly a third of its 19,000-acre site, located on a promontory of Georgian Bay, has been declared off-limits to military and police personnel training there. Among the contaminants listed on a review of Federal Contaminated Sites: lead, methyl mercury, selenium, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and organo-metallic compounds containing arsenic and zinc—all serious threats to soil, water, marine life and human health.

According to Department of National Defence (DND) documents obtained through an Access to Information request, the military’s own experts warn that the contaminated soil—once disturbed by TC Energy’s construction--could become even more dangerous, leaching dormant toxins into watercourses on the base and from there into the aquifers and wells of the 300 homes, farms and cottages that lie below the reservoir site, as well as directly into Georgian Bay.

“Disturbing the soil would expose more of these elements to the surrounding area (air, land and water),” one report states. “Pollution of the water creates large concerns for marine animals’ health and for any person drawing water from the bay for personal use.”

TC Energy—which has no experience working with UXOs—would be responsible for the costs of clearing all unexploded munitions and other toxins and remediating the site. But as the legal landowner, the Defence Department would retain liability for any damages to life and health.

DND briefing notes estimate that the most basic level of clearance (Level 1 UXO) would cost at least \$50,000 a hectare and take from five to 10 years. But any excavation of the site would require more extensive Level 3 clearance, “which is more costly and time consuming,” the notes add. “It won’t be any easy or cheap ride.”

Four Georgian Bay municipalities have passed resolutions against TC Energy’s project, noting it would “exacerbate” the base contamination and threaten the fresh water of the bay, vital to their recreation and fishing industries.

Now Save Georgian Bay is asking the minister to:

- Immediately halt any exploratory or pre-development work on the project;
- Provide a list of all UXOs and other contaminants, including their concentrations, on the 4th Canadian Division Training Centre as a whole, plus a separate list of the specific toxic chemicals and their concentration on TC Energy’s proposed 375-acre reservoir site;
- Disclose the progress and timeline of all remediation plans, including those for TC Energy’s work area on the base.

The group is also asking for a meeting with the minister to discuss those hazards.

For further information, contact:

Tom Buck (tbuck@savegeorgianbay.ca or 248-321-3205)
or Kellie Haslam (kellie@savegeorgianbay.ca or 416-268-3547)

*Save Georgian Bay is a grassroots advocacy group
committed to stopping TC Energy’s proposed Pumped Storage Project in Meaford, Ontario*

www.savegeorgianbay.ca





April 22, 2024

The Honourable Bill Blair
Minister of National Defence
101 Colonel By Drive,
Ottawa, Ontario K1A-0K2

Dear Minister Blair,

We are writing as members of Save Georgian Bay, a grassroots organization committed to stopping TC Energy's proposed pumped storage plant in Meaford, Ontario, which threatens to cause irreversible harm to the Niagara Escarpment and the waters of Georgian Bay.

We support the federal government's efforts to combat the climate change crisis with renewable energy and storage solutions but we do not believe this massive hydro-electric project—estimated to cost at least \$7 billion—is the best way to achieve those goals. Not only does it threaten irreparable harm to the environment, it makes no economic sense. Even the Independent Electricity System Operator, which manages Ontario's grid, has twice vetoed the project as an example of outdated technology that will provide no net economic benefit to provincial ratepayers.

Why then are we writing to you, the Minister of National Defence? Because we believe one of the project's greatest dangers is its proposed site: the Defence Department's 4th Canadian Division Training Centre in Meaford. As DND has documented, vast tracts of the 19,000-acre base are littered with unexploded ordnance (UXOs) and toxic chemicals from decades of live-fire tank and weapons training.

We urgently request you to halt all exploratory and other pre-construction work for TC Energy's project on the base, which poses a threat both to the environment and human health.

The perils of those contaminants are clear, both to members of the military and police forces currently training there, as well as to the surrounding civilian population. On a Defence Department map of the range provided to Meaford's council in 2021 (See Attachment A), three sites are considered so contaminated that they are off-limits to military personnel today. One is labelled "White Phosphorous" - a highly toxic substance used in smoke grenades, tracer shells and mortars that ignites on contact with oxygen and can cause severe burns and total organ failure. Among the other chemicals of concern listed on a Treasury Board Review of Federal Contaminated Sites: lead, methyl mercury, selenium, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and organo-metallic compounds containing zinc and arsenic – all threats to human health, aquatic life, soil and water.

There may be many other toxins as well. A chemical solvent called Trichloroethylene (TCE) was commonly used as a degreasing agent until the 1990s on military bases across North America. More recently, outcries have been raised by firefighters exposed to the potential carcinogens of Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), also known as 'forever chemicals' because they don't break down in the environment or human bodies. The military has been one of the largest users of PFAS, found in firefighting gear and foam employed during training exercises.

The existence of those toxins on the base is worrisome enough, but even the Defence Department's experts warn they would become all the more dangerous if and when the soil is disturbed by TC Energy's massive construction plans—specifically the excavation of its proposed 375-acre reservoir on the escarpment plateau of

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the base. Thanks to the many watercourses clearly visible on maps of the area, those toxins—once disturbed—risk draining into the aquifers and wells of the 300 homes, farms and cottages situated below the reservoir and even directly into Georgian Bay itself, the source of drinking water to thousands for miles around. The Defence Department’s own documents, obtained by Save Georgian Bay through an Access to Information request, indicate concern for “marine animals' health and for any person drawing water from the bay for personal use.” (See Attachment B)

Given those alarms raised by your own department, Save Georgian Bay is asking the Defence Department to:

1. immediately halt any advancement of the project on the base, including pre-development drilling and other preliminary or exploratory work;
2. provide a list of all contaminants and UXOs on the 4th Canadian Division Training Centre as a whole, as well as their concentrations, plus a separate list of those toxic substances and their concentrations on, or in close proximity to, TC Energy's proposed 375-acre reservoir site;
3. report on those chemicals' known harm to human health;
4. disclose what remediation plans are now in place by DND and/or have been promised by TC Energy to deal with this danger both to the military and the residents whose properties lie below the base, but also to all residents around the Georgian Bay basin who rely on it as a source of drinking water;
5. meet personally with members of Save Georgian Bay to discuss these issues.

We await acknowledgement that you have received this request and look forward to your department's expeditious response. Despite claims that this project is a climate-change solution, we ask you to put a moratorium on what is, in fact, a multi-billion dollar corporate greenwashing scheme that would not only cause devastation to the environment but poses urgent public health and safety concerns for your own military personnel as well as the residents of Meaford and all those around Georgian Bay.

With thanks for your time and attention,

Tom Buck (tbuck@savegeorgianbay.ca or 248-321-3205) and
Kellie Haslam (kellie@savegeorgianbay.ca or 416-268-3647
for the Directors of Save Georgian Bay

Encl. A: “Update - 4th Canadian Division Training Centre Payment In Lieu of Taxes Appeal” May 31, 2021
Encl. B: Excerpt from 2000 pages received from an Access to Information request

c.c.: Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Steven Guilbeault, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
Diane Lebovillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources
Alex Ruff, Member of Parliament, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound
Daniel Minden, Director of Communications
Diana Ebadi, Press Secretary and Communications Advisor