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Nuclear-safety agency not adequately inspecting power plants, watchdog says

[Gloria Galloway](#)

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The federal agency charged with ensuring the safety of Canada's nuclear power plants is unable to prove that it is inspecting those facilities often or thoroughly enough or that it has the number of staff required to do the job, says a new report by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

The audit released by the commissioner on Tuesday as part of her fall report calls into question whether the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), which is often accused by environmentalists of being too close to the industry it was established to monitor, is providing proper oversight of the country's nuclear reactors.

The auditors could find no proof that the CNSC has determined how many inspections are needed to ensure that nuclear power plant operators are complying with their licensing and regulatory requirements. Nor, says the audit, could the regulator demonstrate that it takes risks into account when making decisions about which inspections it would and would not conduct.

"Site inspections are one of the key verification tools used by the CNSC to assure Canadians that nuclear power plants perform safely," wrote Julie Gelfand, the environment commissioner, in presenting the audit to the House of Commons. "We found that the CNSC could not show that it had adequate, systematic, risk-informed processes for planning site inspections at nuclear power plants."

The audit follows on the heels of an anonymous letter sent earlier this year to CNSC president Michael Binder, purportedly written by technologists inside the regulator, that pointed to five separate cases in which the commission's staff sat on relevant material about risk or non-compliance that might have called the safety of a plant into question.

Dr. Binder, who was appointed by the previous Conservative government after it fired former president Linda Keen when she balked at skirting safety rules, subsequently questioned whether that letter was part of a "conspiracy theory" concocted by outsiders.

But the CNSC management agreed with all of the recommendations made by the environment commissioner to correct the deficiencies that her audit team uncovered in the regulator's inspection regime.

Among other things, the audit says the CNSC conducted only about 48 per cent of the inspections of nuclear plants in 2013-14 and 2014-15 that should have been scheduled under the regulator's five-year plan.

"The decisions about which inspections the CNSC would and would not carry out from the five-year plan were based on professional judgement and the rationales for those decisions – such as on how risks were taken into account – were not documented," says the audit.

In some cases, the inspections were not done because inspectors and technical specialists were not available. The audit says the CNSC could not show that it had assigned an appropriate number of staff to deal with the risks.

In fact, the regulator's senior managers told the auditors that they believed there were enough inspectors to do the work and that more were being assigned as issues arose. But, wrote the auditors, "we were told by site inspectors and site supervisors at every nuclear power plant that there were either not enough inspectors at their sites, or not enough at the levels needed."

In response to the audit, the CNSC says it is updating its five-year plan and will review both its staffing allocation and the frequency and type of inspections that are needed to ensure compliance.

The auditors also found that the regulator could not demonstrate that its staff routinely follows its procedures when carrying out inspections. Nor was the CNSC clear in telling inspectors what information had to be included in their final reports.

The CNSC says it has taken immediate action to raise awareness and ensure observance of site inspection procedures by its inspectors.

But Shawn-Patrick Stensil, a senior energy analyst with Greenpeace Canada, said the audit proves that "Canada's so-called nuclear watchdog is all bark and no bite. The CNSC needs to actually oversee nuclear safety instead of just reassuring Canadians nuclear power is safe."

Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's report on Inspection of Nuclear Power Plants

The Audit:

In a 2000 audit, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada found that while the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission monitored the compliance

of power reactor licensees with regulatory requirements, its activities were not based on a rigorous, well-documented system of risk analysis. A follow-up audit in 2005 showed that the Commission's progress in developing a formal, well-articulated risk-management approach to power reactor regulation had been slower than planned.

In 2016, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development undertook a third audit of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. This audit focused on whether or not CNSC adequately managed nuclear power plant site inspections. Inspections are one of the CNSC's main tools to assure Canadians that nuclear power plants perform safely and comply with regulatory requirements and licence conditions.

Findings:

The audit found that the CNSC conducted site inspections, identified instances of non-compliance, and followed up with plant operators. However, the Commission could not show that it has a well-documented planning process for site inspections at nuclear power plants. It did not carry out a quarter of the inspections it had planned over a two-year period, and three quarters of the inspections it did conduct went ahead without an approved inspection guide, though the Commission's own procedures requires one. In other words, the Commission could not demonstrate that it is conducting the right number and type of inspections to provide the coverage required to confirm that compliance is sufficient.

More info:

Read our [report](#) for more about these and other findings of this audit.

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<http://lindaduncan.ndp.ca/ndp-calls-on-government-to-act-on-nuclear-safety>

NDP calls on government to act on nuclear safety

October 4th, 2016 - 11:11am

OTTAWA – The NDP is calling on the Liberal government to act on the findings in the Environment Commissioner’s fall report concerning troubling gaps in the inspection of nuclear power plants by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC).

“It is very troubling to learn that Canada’s nuclear safety regulator is improvising when it comes to nuclear plant inspections,” said NDP Leader Tom Mulcair. “The regulator is not even following their own regulations and has no documentation to reassure Canadians.”

The Commissioner could find no proof that the CNSC has determined how many inspections are needed to ensure that nuclear power plant operators are complying with their licensing and regulatory requirements. The CNSC could also not demonstrate that it takes risks into account when making decisions about which inspections it would and would not conduct.

“These confirm many of the concerns raised this summer in a letter from whistleblowers at the nuclear watchdog – but when we wrote to the Minister about these concerns he passed the buck to the CNSC President who literally laughed them off,” added Mulcair. “The Commissioner today has made clear that deep problems at the nuclear regulator are no laughing matter.”

When it comes to nuclear safety, Canadians expect far better than this.

[[Letter from Tom Mulcair](#) to Minister Carr & [response letter from the Minister](#) attached.]

Files

- [ministercarr-en.pdf](#)
- [reply_jim_carr-03082016.pdf](#)

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/environment-commissioner-report-fall-2016-1.3790293>

Nuclear power plant safety inspections hit and miss, watchdog says

A federal watchdog has issued an urgent call to the country's nuclear regulator to tighten inspections of Canada's nuclear power plants, calling the current situation "not acceptable."

In a report released Tuesday, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development Julie Gelfand finds a number of failings at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the agency responsible for ensuring nuclear plants are safe and secure.

- [Trudeau's carbon price plan](#)
- [Provinces must price carbon by 2018](#)
- [Where provinces stand on carbon](#)

Gelfand said 75 per cent of site safety inspections were carried out without an approved guide, and compared that scenario to a pilot taking off on a flight without going through a safety checklist.

"I think it's pretty serious," she said Tuesday at a news conference across from Parliament Hill.

Gelfand said the commission is not systematic or rigorous in its planning and documentation, relying instead on the professional judgment of staff.

"This kind of lack of precision in a precision industry I think is really not acceptable," she said. "These mistakes should not happen when we're dealing with nuclear power plants."

Her report said the CNSC could not demonstrate that its inspection plans included the appropriate number and types of inspections, or that it had the staff needed to verify that nuclear power plants were complying with requirements.

She said there were errors and incomplete information in the database, recording inspections had been done when they had not been done, and in other cases showing inspections as incomplete when they had in fact been completed.

Inspections not recorded

The report also raises questions about staffing and whether the CNSC has enough inspectors to carry out its mandate.

"While senior management told us that they believed there were enough inspectors and that more were reassigned as issues arose, we were told by site inspectors and site supervisors at every nuclear power plant that there were either not enough inspectors at their sites or not enough at the levels needed," the report says.

Gelfand says Nuclear Commission failing to do proper inspections

The CNSC issues licenses and monitors Canada's four nuclear power plants in Ontario and New Brunswick.

The CSNC accepted the report's recommendations. In a statement released Tuesday, it said the CNSC took corrective actions immediately after learning about the findings.

"I have always welcomed peer reviews, international benchmarking, audits and evaluations, as part of our commitment to continuous improvement. We have already completed work on most of the recommendations, and will comprehensively address all of the report's findings by the end of March 2017," reads the statement from CNSC's president and chief executive officer Michael Binder.

3 audit reports

The audit of inspections at Canadian nuclear power plants was one of three reports tabled today.

A second examined how various government departments, including Justice, National Defence, Parks Canada, Public Services and Procurement and Veterans Affairs made positive or negative environmental impacts in their policies, plans and programs.

It found all departments except for Parks Canada fell short in adequately applying the government's environmental assessment strategy.

A third audit revealed major problems with the management of Canada's major fish stocks.

Gelfand said the office embarked on the audit to determine if there could be a stock collapse like the cod collapse of 1992.

Her investigation found 15 stocks in critical condition and in need of rebuilding plans, yet they were still being fished. Twelve of those stocks did not even have rebuilding plans.

"We are at potential risk for another stock to potentially collapse," she warned.

Missing fish files

Overall, the report found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada was missing key information needed to manage fish stocks sustainably.

The department had management plans for 110 of Canada's 154 major fish stocks, but plans for the remaining 44 were either missing or out of date.

It also points out Fisheries and Oceans Canada had significant budget cuts between 2011 and 2016, and that the department has been unable to complete all its scientific surveys of fish stocks because of mechanical problems aboard Canadian Coast Guard vessels.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada has agreed to the report's recommendations. The federal government has promised to increase the department's budget by \$197 million over five years.

The department says it will use that new funding to improve monitoring of key species of marine mammals and fish.

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- [Cod returning, but long way to go for successful fishery, plant CEOs say](#)