



# A Paradox in a Company Town: A News Media Analysis of the Canadian General Electric Plant's Toxic Legacy



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## Background

Since 1981, the Canadian General Electric (CGE) plant in Peterborough exposed workers to hazardous chemicals without proper safety measures. John Ball, a former employee from the 1960s-1990s, became an activist after witnessing many coworkers die from workplace illnesses. In 2018, the John Ball Legacy Project was founded by local volunteers to honour his efforts and to continue advocating for justice for former CGE workers.



## Methodology

The research involved quantitative and qualitative media analysis to assess media coverage of the CGE plant's occupational and environmental harms. The quantitative analysis focused on sources, number of stories, publication dates, and key sources quoted. The qualitative analysis examined framing, language, and themes used. Two databases were used to find the sources: Canadian News Stream (CNS) and Nexis Uni Plus. In total, 20 sources were found within the study's timeframe of 2004-2018.

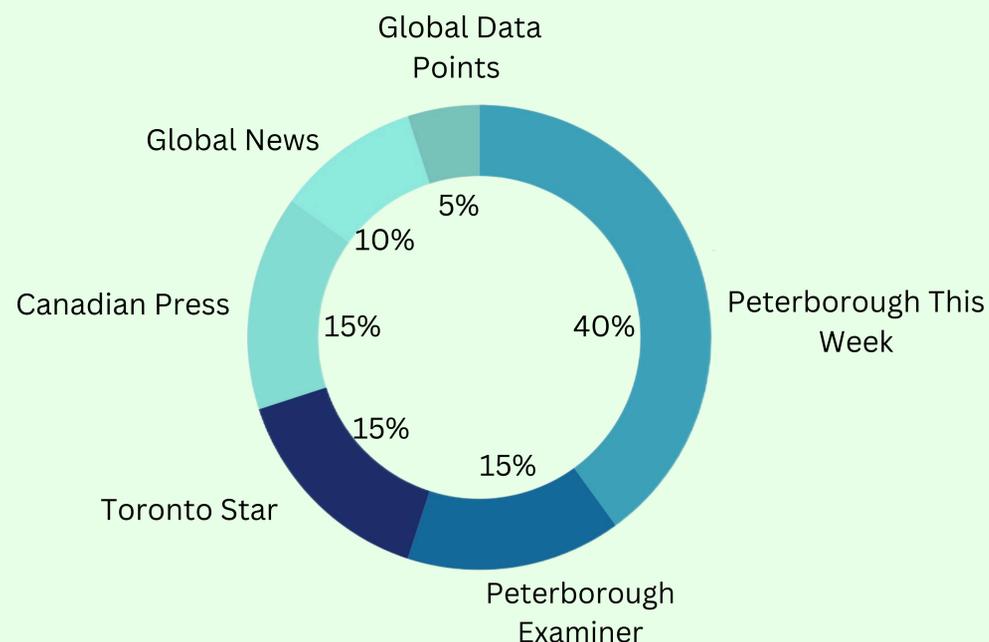
## Project Goals

This community-based research project, in collaboration with the John Ball Legacy Project, examines how the news media reported the toxic legacy of the CGE plant in Peterborough, Ontario.

## Research Questions

- 1 How does the news media frame and portray stories about the occupational and environmental harms associated with the Canadian General Electric Plant in Peterborough?
- 2 How extensive is the media coverage of the occupational and environmental harms caused by the Canadian General Electric Plant, and what is its reach?
- 3 How does the media coverage contribute to or reflect the "blanket of silence" in the Peterborough community regarding the toxic legacy of the Canadian General Electric Plant?

## Distribution of Media Sources



## Preliminary Findings

- Since 2016, articles mostly blame health officials for dismissing compensation claims, while those since 2004 blame the CGE plant for disease impacts. All articles frame the issue as ongoing, with hundreds still seeking compensation.
- Coverage spiked from 2016-2018, coinciding with the plant's 2018 closure, but remains mostly local.
- Framing analysis shows 35% blame CGE, 25% blame health officials, 10% blame silence, and 25% are neutral. Source quotes include 30% former CGE workers, 25% family members, 15% government, 5% WSIB, and 15% other. All articles are written by reporters, with no outside contributions.
- The CGE plant's response remains unclear, with articles only noting its closure. Coverage focuses on workers' compensation struggles and the plant's lack of accountability until 2004. Every article thus far frames the issue as ongoing rather than an isolated issue.

## Next Steps

Future research should compare media coverage with John Ball Legacy's interviews of CGE workers and families to identify gaps and silenced voices. Future research might also analyze social media to assess alternative avenues for public awareness of CGE's toxic legacy.