



BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION & BURIAL OF NUCLEAR WASTE

For the last decade, an organization of nuclear power companies called the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) has been carrying out a siting process to identify a location for a “deep geological repository” (DGR) in which they intend eventually to abandon all of Canada’s stockpiles of high-level radioactive wastes. These wastes have been created by using nuclear power to produce electricity. The provincial utilities that operate the reactors now find themselves with 60,000 tonnes of highly radioactive waste, which will be extremely dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years.

We have six key concerns about the NWMO project:

- **There will be radioactive releases from the NWMO’s operation**, including from the processing plant at the DGR site and from the DGR itself. The designs are still under development and all the NWMO has released to date are “conceptual” descriptions of the Used Fuel Packaging Plant (UFPP) and DGR; even the NWMO’s own preliminary information identified that there will be radioactive releases from Used Fuel Packaging Plant. Also, the repository tunnels and emplacement rooms will be too radioactive to allow workers to be present, but the air from deep underground will be released to the surface unfiltered. The documents also acknowledge that there will be additional radioactive wastes generated at the DGR site.
- **Waste will be transported to the site for more than 50 years. The NWMO’s reference plan includes** 2-3 trucks per day and/or by rail hauling the highly radioactive waste from the reactor stations to the DGR site for 50 years or longer. Reactor refurbishment or new reactor construction, including from other provinces, will add decades of DGR operation and radioactive waste transportation. Each shipment will release low levels of radiation and an accident could result in much higher releases. There is no safe level of exposure to radiation.
- **The NWMO is using the Township of Ignace as a proxy decision-maker**, and their “willingness process” excludes residents living closer to the site and communities downstream from the site and along the transportation route. Ignace is more than 40 kilometres east of the candidate site in the Revell area; Ignace should not be the decision-maker for all the communities downstream and along the transportation route. The risk will be borne by many; the decision cannot be made by just a few.
- **The NWMO has reserved the option of initiating transfer of the radioactive waste from the reactor stations to the site selected for a DGR for “interim storage”** before determining if the geology of that site is appropriate. Under this early-transport option, the NWMO could place the waste in what they call "shallow caverns" before the research is complete or the DGR has been licensed. This “option” is often omitted from the NWMO’s descriptions.
- **There is no other operating deep geological repository for high-level radioactive fuel waste anywhere in the world.** When this experiment fails, the downstream waters are at risk; there are hundreds of thousands of people living downstream in the English River-Wabigoon and Turtle River-Lake of the Woods watersheds toward Lake Winnipeg. Radioactive releases from the repository could affect thousands of lakes, camps, lodges, cottagers, Indigenous hunting and harvesting areas, and businesses in Northwestern Ontario and Manitoba.

NWMO Focus on Northwestern Ontario

Early in 2020 the NWMO announced that it would focus on two communities: South Bruce in Bruce County in Southwestern Ontario, and Ignace, in Kenora District in Northwestern Ontario. However, the candidate DGR site in Northwestern Ontario is more than 40 kilometres outside Ignace’s municipal boundaries, and in a different watershed. Ignace has no authority over the Revell Area, which is just south of the hamlets of Borups Corners and Dymont, and roughly equidistant between Ignace and Dryden. Despite this, both the Township of Ignace and the NWMO are proceeding as if Ignace could be the decision-maker in this siting process.

In December 2021, the Township of Ignace made a decision that it will not be the residents of Ignace who will decide if Ignace is a “willing host” to the NWMO’s project; instead, Township Council will decide if Ignace is “willing”. More recently the Township of Ignace has hired a consulting firm to “engage” with residents, including carrying out interviews and encouraging residents to use an online polling system to respond yes, no, or abstain to the statement: “I support the Township of Ignace continuing to pursue locating a Deep Geological Repository of used nuclear fuel near Ignace”. The consultants will then report to a “Willingness Committee” (still not announced as of February 15, 2024) and the Committee will make a recommendation to Council. Council will then make a decision as to whether Ignace is “willing”.

Even at this late point in the NWMO process, on the eve of the NWMO asking communities to declare their “willingness” to host the nuclear waste burial project, there is no complete description of the NWMO project. Many parts of the project, such as the used fuel packaging plant, are still not fully designed. Other parts, such as “shallow burial”, are optional but not included in most of the NWMO hand-out materials and presentations. The level of risk and of radioactive releases could change with different decisions the NWMO might make during the final project design, after “willingness” has been declared.

No community should be asked if it is “willing” to accept a project before they know fully and in detail what the project will include and how it will be carried out and can participate in and know the results of an independent environmental assessment.

Every community that may be affected by the project – including those downstream and along the transportation route – should be part of determining if there is a “willing” host community. The “community” includes us all.

