

Suspension of Expressions of Interest >>

What is the Site Selection Process for Canada's Used Nuclear Fuel Repository and Centre of Expertise?

In May 2010, the NWMO initiated a site selection process for Canada's Used Nuclear Fuel Repository and Centre of Expertise. The site selection process for this national infrastructure project was developed through dialogue with Canadians to ensure that the site selected is in an informed and willing community, and is safe and secure for people and the environment now and in the future. The process involves nine steps that will take 10 years or more to complete, and begins with a community expressing interest in learning more about the project, the NWMO and the site selection process. Once communities have entered the process, several phases of learning and progressively more detailed studies begin to assess the suitability of the community and specific sites for the project. Communities that enter the site selection process may leave the process at any time up until the signing of a final agreement, which is still many years in the future.

The site selection process is designed to ensure that:

- >> Any community selected to host the facility is informed about the project and willing to host it;
- >> Any site selected to host the facility will safely contain and isolate used nuclear fuel for a very long period of time, in an appropriate geological formation, and that there is an acceptable way of transporting used fuel to the site;
- >> Any interested host community carefully and thoroughly considers the project's potential benefits and risks when deciding whether to express interest, and ultimately, willingness to host it;
- >> Surrounding communities, regions and other jurisdictional levels potentially affected by the project and the transportation of used fuel are involved in the assessment and planning of the project;
- >> First Nations, Métis and Inuit who will be potentially affected by the implementation of the project are involved; and
- >> There is an ongoing conversation on questions to be answered and issues to be addressed throughout the site selection process.

How have communities been involved to date?

In May 2010, the site selection process was opened to all communities interested in learning more about Canada's plan for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel, the NWMO and the site selection process. Since that time, a number of communities expressed interest in learning more about the project, the NWMO and the site selection process.

At this time, 21 communities are actively engaged in exploring interest in the project: Arran-Elderslie, Blind River, Brockton, Central Huron, Ear Falls, Elliot Lake, Hornepayne, Huron-Kinloss, Ignace, Manitouwadge, Nipigon, North Shore, Saugeen Shores, Schreiber, South Bruce, Spanish, Wawa, and White River in Ontario; and Creighton, English River First Nation and Pinehouse in Saskatchewan.

Communities that successfully pass an initial screening of the potential suitability of the community for the project must then decide whether they wish to proceed to more detailed preliminary assessment studies and broad engagement (Step 3). A number of communities have already proceeded to Step 3, and the NWMO has initiated preliminary assessment studies with these communities.

Communities are under no obligation to continue their exploration of the project; they may leave the process at any time up until the signing of a final agreement, which is still many years into the future.

Why did the NWMO suspend the expressions of interest phase of the site selection process?

The NWMO took this step in order to focus its efforts on conducting the detailed studies required in communities that formally expressed an interest on or before September 30, 2012. A six-month notice of this suspension was issued in March 2012.

The suspension of the expressions of interest phase of the site selection process will help ensure that the best knowledge and expertise are brought to each of the studies that are conducted. It is also intended to ensure that the communities involved in the site selection process continue to be fully supported by the NWMO in their exploration of the project, and are informed, as early as possible, whether they are on the short list of strong candidates for the project. The suspension of the expressions of interest phase will also help the NWMO plan for and fully support the involvement of surrounding communities and potentially affected Aboriginal peoples.

The NWMO respects and is greatly appreciative of the professionalism of the communities that have involved themselves in the site selection process to date, the efforts they have made to learn about and consider this project, and the leadership they have shown in exploring the role they might play in this important national infrastructure project designed to protect people and the environment today and for future generations.

What happens next?

The potential suitability of a community for this project will be assessed through progressively more detailed scientific, technical and community well-being studies. These studies are designed to ensure that there is a site with geology that can safely contain and isolate used nuclear fuel for the long periods of time during which it remains hazardous, and that the project can be implemented in a way that fosters the well-being of the local community and region. Broad awareness building, learning and engagement of community members, surrounding communities and Aboriginal peoples is an important component of the site selection process.

The NWMO is optimistic that the studies that have been initiated will identify viable options for implementing this project. However, until all work has been completed, the outcome of these studies is uncertain, and it may be necessary to study other communities and sites as potential hosts for the project in the future. The NWMO therefore reserves the option of reopening the process to expressions of interest by new communities in the future.

Will the NWMO continue to provide information to new interested communities?

Yes. The NWMO has committed to providing information, regular updates and briefings upon request to interested communities, groups and individuals throughout the site selection process. However, no additional screenings or preliminary assessment studies will be initiated during the suspension with communities that did not enter the site selection process by September 30, 2012.

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