nwmo
NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION
SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION DES DÉCHETS NUCLÉAIRES

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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF CANADA'S USED NUCLEAR FUEL

What are the issues? What are the options? How should they be analyzed? Those are the questions posed in the first NWMO discussion document.

Entitled, "Asking the Right Questions? The Future Management of Canada's Used Nuclear Fuel," the document sets out background on used nuclear fuel in Canada and invites people to become involved in collaboratively developing a long-term management approach that is socially acceptable, technically sound, environmentally responsible and economically feasible.

A number of activities led to development of the first NWMO discussion document. A series of early conversations and public opinion research helped provide a sense of Canadians' expectations for the NWMO process and the issues that need to be considered.

A four-part scenarios exercise explored different futures that might occur over the long time horizons that need to be contemplated.

Experts in fields as diverse as ethics, traditional knowledge, finance and law were commissioned to prepare background papers on some of the broad questions which must be addressed. And, several workshops brought together teams of experts to help develop key questions to be applied to the nuclear waste management options which are studied.

The NWMO wants to know if it has listened well. Through its discussion document, the organization is asking Canadians a number of questions. Is the problem correctly described? Are the appropriate long-term waste management approaches being considered? Are the right questions being asked to assess the different methods? And, is the NWMO decision making process understandable and appropriate?

The discussion document describes fourteen management approaches which have been considered at various times over the history of

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ADVISORY COUNCIL: NEW MEMBER

EVA LIGETI APPOINTED

Eva Ligeti, Ontario's first Environmental Commissioner, has accepted an appointment to the Advisory Council of Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO).

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Eva Ligeti: New Appointment

NWMO WEBSITE

www.nwmo.ca continues to be the main repository of information about the NWMO and its work. The website received a significant information boost with the addition of a number of papers commissioned to provide up-to-date reports on the status of knowledge about long-term nuclear waste management.

Canadian and international experts were asked to address topics like: a) a review of potential management systems, b) the status of geospheric and biospheric research, c) lessons learned from other experiences in hazardous waste management, d) financing considerations and e) various components of our legal and administrative frameworks.

"Providing factual information, written in a manner that is understandable, is critical to our process," said NWMO president Elizabeth Dowdeswell. "People need a common foundation in order to make informed choices about difficult issues," she added.

Several guiding concept papers have also been prepared by a number of international authorities to help guide an informed dialogue. They include perspectives on risk, security, the precautionary approach, adaptive management, traditional knowledge and sustainable development.

The website has also begun reporting on various engagement activities. All papers generated through workshops and panels are being posted.

The NWMO is exploiting the interactive nature of its website. It is conducting online surveys and polls, and plans are underway to facilitate further public involvement through e-dialogues. ■

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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

nuclear electricity generation. It groups them into three categories: a) methods which the NWMO is obliged to review, b) other methods which are receiving international attention and, c) a number of methods which are of limited interest.

Ten key questions are suggested to form the basis of an analytical framework which might be applied to the various approaches. The questions address social, environmental, economic and technical aspects of the different options. They also look at overarching issues like: a) institutions and governance, b) engagement and participation throughout implementation of the management approaches, c) ethical considerations and d) opportunities provided by the options for continuous learning and improvement.

Over the coming months the NWMO will utilize a number of innovative engagement techniques, including its website, asking Canadians to reflect on its work and provide their perspectives. A second discussion document, "Understanding the Choices," will be published in mid 2004 and will build on reaction to the first document, offering a more complete analytical framework along with a preliminary comparative assessment of the management approaches.

The draft final report, "Choosing the Way Forward – Draft," is expected in early 2005 and will contain the NWMO's draft recommendations on an approach and plans for its implementation.

"We intend to keep people informed of our progress every step of the way," said NWMO president Elizabeth Dowdeswell. "By reporting periodically, and allowing people time to think through the issues and contribute their perspectives, we will ensure that there are no surprises when we make our recommendations to the government in November, 2005," she added. ■

ETHICS ROUNDTABLE

The NWMO Ethical Expert Roundtable offered up a number of observations after a productive first meeting. Among other things, the group suggested that the NWMO should embed ethical and value considerations in all aspects of its study. Ethics should be used to identify the implications of decisions throughout the study, they said.

Other important topics raised and considered by the group included the importance of the decision-making process which will be adopted, and the need to recognize the future of nuclear power as a fundamental contextual issue. The issue of equity, both within the current generation and across generations, was another matter addressed during the free-ranging, day-long discussion.

The Ethics Roundtable, which will convene several times at critical points of the NWMO study, is composed of six distinguished Canadians. They are: Andrew Brook, Arthur Wesley Cragg, Georges Erasumus, the Hon. David MacDonald, Arthur Schafer, and Margaret Somerville. ■

Be Involved

The NWMO wants Canadians to become involved and help shape its study of nuclear waste management approaches. We're using electronic and face-to-face methods to dialogue with you and ensure your values and concerns are considered. Let your ideas and perspectives be known.

SUBSCRIBE TO NWMO E-MAIL LISTS

Visit **www.nwmo.ca**

NWMO WORKSHOPS

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE GUIDANCE

How can traditional knowledge provide guidance to the NWMO study of nuclear waste management approaches? Twenty-three people, primarily elders and traditional knowledge practitioners from across Canada, gathered at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon to discuss that and other issues regarding the NWMO mandate.

Traditional knowledge is more than a simple compilation of facts drawn from local, and often remote, environments. It is a complex and sophisticated system of knowledge, drawing on centuries of wisdom and experience. It grows constantly and changes with new information. To use this sophistication one must include the aboriginal peoples themselves as practitioners. Traditional knowledge systems assume that people are part of the land, not that they own it. Practitioners consider themselves true guardians.

Traditional Knowledge: a world view

Workshop participants expressed appreciation that the NWMO considered traditional knowledge early in its study process. Much work will be needed to better understand whether and how it can help guide the study.

TECHNICAL ADVICE

Fifty-five of Canada's top nuclear specialists, engineers and scientists met at McMaster University in Hamilton to discuss the technical aspects of nuclear fuel waste management.

Mac Reactor: research since 1959

Organized by the McMaster Institute for Energy Studies and sponsored by the NWMO, the event attracted men and women from business and industry, academia, government and the non-government sectors. Discussion focused on the storage, disposal and re-processing of used nuclear fuel. Issues explored included the nature of high level waste, active versus passive management approaches, risks and benefits associated with transportation, and the time horizons required for technology development.

While at McMaster, NWMO president Elizabeth Dowdeswell visited the university's nuclear reactor which began operation in 1959.

Co-chairs for the workshop were Les Shemilt, McMaster professor emeritus, chemical engineering, and David Shoesmith, professor, chemistry at The University of Western Ontario. The report produced as a result of the workshop will identify some of the key technical issues, questions, and broad parameters that need to be addressed in the NWMO study.

ENVIRONMENT SUGGESTIONS

Ottawa was the location of a day long workshop convened to discuss environmental aspects of used nuclear fuel management. The event was facilitated by former Senior ADM in the Federal Department of Environment, Robert Slater, and Chris Hanlon, a consultant experienced in environmental policy and resource issues. Experts drawn from industry and business, academia, government and the NGO sector provided advice on the environmental parameters that govern decision-making, and the environmental questions that need to be answered regarding nuclear fuel waste management.

Suggestions which emerged from the discussions focussed on the themes of: a) the need for environmental science in decision making, b) enhancing the environmental assessment process and, c) environmental considerations in governance, now and in the future.

The group identified nine key environmental questions that should be asked in the review and assessment of possible management approaches. Among other things, they included consideration of: the ecosphere, ecological processes, environmental health and the effects of climate and geospheric change. Participants also pointed out the need for appropriate monitoring and reporting to ensure effective public involvement and transparent decision-making. ■

Environment Workshop: long-term monitoring

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TRUDEAU FELLOWSHIP

NWMO president Elizabeth Dowdeswell has been appointed a Trudeau Mentor. She is one of six Canadians and a Nigerian named to join the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation intellectual network, dedicated to finding innovative policy solutions to important issues facing Canada and the world. As a mentor, Ms. Dowdeswell will be assigned to help guide the research of one or more Trudeau scholars.

Other appointees include: Louise Arbour, Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Allan Blakeney, Visiting Scholar at the University of Saskatchewan and Judith Maxwell, President and founder of the Canadian Policy Research Network.

"This is a group of people who are true leaders in their fields," said Industry Minister Allan Rock. "They know how policies are developed and they understand the conditions under which they can succeed and bring promise to shaping society and democracy in Canada and around the world," he added. ■

"This is a group of people who are true leaders in their fields."

— Allan Rock, Industry Minister

Coming soon...

ON THE ROAD

PRESIDENT ENGAGES CANADIANS

"I welcome opportunities to get our message out."

— Elizabeth Dowdeswell, NWMO President

Saskatoon: delivering the message

NWMO President Elizabeth Dowdeswell speaks often to groups interested in the NWMO and its study. "I welcome opportunities to get our message out," said Ms. Dowdeswell. "Canadians need to know that ours is an inclusive and transparent process, and that all views on the long-term management of used nuclear fuel are valued," she added.

In Saskatchewan, Ms. Dowdeswell told members and guests of the North Saskatoon Business Association that the NWMO challenge is, "to develop a contract between science and society. We must integrate the best science with the evolving social and ethical values of society," she said. "We must ensure that any scientifically sound plan for nuclear waste management has a level of informed public support or societal acceptance." ■

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ADVISORY COUNCIL: NEW MEMBER

A lawyer, Ms. Ligeti is the Executive Director of the Clean Air Partnership, a non-profit organization with a mandate to make Toronto more environmentally sustainable and a world leader in clean air. As Environmental Commissioner from 1994 to 1999 she reported to the Ontario legislature annually on the provincial government's compliance with the Environmental Bill of Rights.

"How used nuclear fuel will be managed over the long-term is a very difficult challenge," said Ms. Ligeti. "From an environmental and social justice perspective, it is vital that the NWMO do its study and consultation well and consider its recommended plan carefully."

"The Advisory Council is a significant guarantor of the public interest," said NWMO president Elizabeth Dowdeswell. "We welcome and encourage its active involvement," she added.

The NWMO Advisory Council is chaired by the Hon. David Crombie. It provides independent and arms-length advice to the organization. It is also required to comment on the NWMO study and the waste management approaches that are considered. ■

NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

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