



NUCLEAR WASTE
MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATION

SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION
DES DÉCHETS
NUCLÉAIRES

January 2003

Final Report

Phase One: Report on Discussion Group Findings

Navigator

research

strategy



results

**Nuclear Waste Management
Organization**

Report on Discussion Group Findings

January 2003

NAVIGATOR



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Executive Summary

This report provides findings from discussion groups conducted in late 2002 as part of the public opinion research program of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO).

Earlier that year, Parliament passed legislation requiring a new entity be established to study specific options for long-term nuclear waste management in Canada and recommend an approach that is economically viable, technically sound and socially acceptable to the federal Cabinet by 2005. Consequently, the NWMO was formed by the three major entities now responsible for nuclear waste management in Canada, namely Ontario Power Generation, Hydro-Quebec and New Brunswick Power.

The NWMO retained Navigator Limited (Navigator) as an independent public opinion specialist to investigate relevant public attitudes. From November 21 to December 12 2002, Navigator conducted fourteen discussion groups in seven locations. Recruited to one group in each centre were adult Canadians deemed 'sensitive' to the issues of the day because they had recently discussed an environmental, local or social issue with others. Invited to the second group in each location were adult Canadians deemed 'aware' of topical issues because they regularly read or watch the news.

Notable among the discussion group findings were the following:

1. Unaided awareness and knowledge of nuclear waste and its source, nuclear power, were extremely low.
2. Emotions during the group discussions were subdued. Participants were not intensely interested in the issues.
3. The basis for beginning a discussion with participants did not exist. Indeed, comments on the waste management options under study by the NWMO were unreliable since participants had no context for evaluating them.
4. For many participants, the facts only went so far. Thinking about the issues caused more worry.
5. The American news and cultural media were defining participants' perceptions and attitudes on the matter.
6. Issue engagement was low. Participants never expected to have the ability to make an informed decision on this matter. Consequently they claimed to be less likely to participate in the NWMO process unless their 'backyard' was threatened. A variety of opinions emerged on what constituted 'my backyard'. The vast majority did not see themselves as affected, since they did not perceive themselves as living close to a

nuclear facility or a proposed site, or along the route to one. Some defined 'my backyard' as 'all of Canada' and a few as 'the world'.

7. Many were willing to extend trust to the NWMO, its people and study process so long as these were:
 - Independent of government and the nuclear industry;
 - Benchmarked against the world's best;
 - Directed by science;
 - Led by an active and known CEO;
 - Counseled by an expert Advisory Council; and
 - Competently managed.
8. Participants did believe that now is the time for the NWMO to conduct expert research, multi-party evaluation and public communications of the long-term waste management options. They were split on whether now is the time for selection of a long-term nuclear waste management approach for Canada.
9. Overwhelmingly participants preferred communications consistent with the NWMO "thinking out loud." Such communications would be better received if delivered as bite-sized messages in reader or user-friendly language through a range of accessible media.

A. Project Parameters

NWMO Aims and Objectives

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) was created by federal statute to study options for a long-term approach to nuclear waste management in Canada. It must submit a report that recommends an economically viable, technically sound and socially acceptable approach to the federal Cabinet approval by 2005.

Earning the trust and support of Canadians through public participation in the study process has been identified by the NWMO as a critical factor to the successful fulfillment of its mandate. There is a pressing need for effective NWMO communications with Canadians concerning:

- The study process it will follow;
- The waste management options it will examine; and
- The opportunities for public input it will offer.

Public Opinion Research Mandate

The NWMO retained Navigator as an independent public opinion specialist to investigate public attitudes toward long-term nuclear waste management. Its mandate was to:

- Identify and explore the range of opinions regarding long-term nuclear waste management.
- Gauge the population's awareness, understanding, interest and potential for participation in the NWMO-led study process.
- Clarify the drivers that are leading to current opinions, highlighting those that could increase the levels of engagement.
- Investigate the best means for communicating with Canadians on this matter.

B. Research Methodology

Taking into account the NWMO's aims and objectives, Navigator conducted a series of exploratory discussion groups based on the following approach.

Key Strategic Questions

- What are the prevailing opinions among Canadians on long-term nuclear waste management?
- Which Canadians are likely to engage on this matter?
- What can the NWMO reasonably expect in terms of public participation?
- What factors will further engage Canadians?
- What NWMO themes, messages and language, vehicles, spokespersons and stakeholder relationships are important to Canadians as part of the NWMO's study process?
- What areas of NWMO performance are most important to the public?

Selection of Discussion Group Cities

Pickering, London, Thunder Bay, Saskatoon, Vancouver, St. John and Trois Rivières were selected for discussion group research. These cities, in total, represent:

- Five of the six major regions of Canada (the Far North was excluded);
- The country's two major linguistic groups;
- Provinces that do and do not produce electricity from nuclear energy;
- Local communities that host nuclear power stations and therefore the facilities for interim nuclear waste storage; and
- Communities that do not host nuclear power stations. Of this set, specific selections were made:
 - Thunder Bay was selected as illustrative of the views of Northern Ontarians.

- London was selected as illustrative of the views of Southern Ontarians.
- Saskatoon was selected due to its proximity to uranium mining, a major feeder industry to nuclear energy production.
- Vancouver was selected due to its great distance from nuclear energy production and waste management options.

Discussion Group Schedule

Discussion groups were held from November 21 to December 12, 2002, as follows:

CITY	DATE
Pickering	November 21, 2002
Trois Rivières	November 27, 2002
Vancouver	December 4, 2002
Thunder Bay	December 9, 2002
Saskatoon	December 10, 2002
London	December 11, 2002
St. John	December 12, 2002

Discussion Group Recruitment Screen

Navigator recruited two types of discussion group participants. Adult Canadians deemed ‘sensitive’ to today’s issues because of their recent participation in formal or informal group discussions on the environment, their local community or social policy, were invited to the first discussion in each location. Adult Canadians who regularly consume news but have not participated in recent group discussions on these selected topics were involved in the second group in each locale.

C. Key Findings

1. Awareness and knowledge are low

Four of the fourteen groups spontaneously identified nuclear waste as a form of waste produced today. The remaining groups required prompting by the moderator to do so.

All groups admitted to a significant lack of knowledge about the facts of nuclear waste, both directly in response to probing questions and indirectly during the discussions.

Participants typically said they were unaware of nuclear waste because of:

- The absence of a problem that warranted becoming more knowledgeable about nuclear waste;
- Deliberate efforts by the nuclear industry, the government or both to keep such information from the public;
- Lack of coverage by the news media;
- A general lack of caring among most people; and
- Our society that values consumption without giving due consideration to its consequences.

“All we know is the information we are given.”

“It [nuclear waste] is so far out of our hands it’s surreal, like a TV show.”

“There are a lot of issues that need to be addressed on a large scale and not enough knowledge for everyone to contribute. So I think for me personally, I feel helpless on that because I don’t have anything to contribute and I think a lot of people in my generation might feel that way too.”

What is nuclear waste?

Few respondents were able to offer any physical description of nuclear waste. Those few who could also believed the term ‘nuclear waste’ carried too much emotional baggage for fair treatment in any discussion about it.

Where does nuclear waste in Canada come from?

Unprompted, most groups identified nuclear energy production and nuclear power plants as major sources of nuclear waste. Only the two Trois Rivières groups viewed nuclear medicine as an equal contributor; all other groups saw it as a minor one if it was mentioned at all. Some groups added nuclear weapons production to the list, typically in relation to the nuclear waste in the United States.

All groups identified Ontario and in some cases Pickering, Bruce and Oshawa as places where nuclear waste is created. Quebec and “the East Coast” were also

mentioned as possibilities in some groups. Manitoba was thought to have “something nuclear” by persons in two groups.

The absence of nuclear generation and therefore waste in British Columbia relieved the participants in both Vancouver groups. They also cited Alberta and Saskatchewan as being “nuclear free”.

Many people in both Trois Rivières groups perceived Canada as an importer of nuclear waste from foreign countries. One or two persons in both Vancouver and St. John groups identified Canada as an exporter of nuclear waste. Persons in Thunder Bay contemplated that it could be exported at some point in the future.

How much nuclear waste is there in Canada?

The overwhelming majority of participants in all groups either could not venture a guess on the volume of waste in storage or over-estimated the actual amount. When given the answer by the moderator, questions invariably arose concerning the rate of future growth.

Where is nuclear waste kept?

Groups tended to guess at where nuclear waste is now kept. Their answers ran the gamut from “Pickering” to “abandoned mine shafts in Northern Ontario” to “not in British Columbia, Alberta, or Saskatchewan”.

There was limited recognition across all groups of the American plan to transport nuclear waste from around the United States to Nevada at Yucca Mountain for burial.

How safe or hazardous is nuclear waste?

All participants believed nuclear waste to be a significant hazard to people’s health, the environment, the water supply and Canada’s safety and security. A few people cited the protective clothing worn by nuclear plant workers as evidence of its hazardousness.

Perspectives on its danger ranged from its volatility to the inability of medicine to treat, mitigate or reverse the health risks from exposure to it, and the failure of science to-date to solve the overall waste challenge.

Most participants significantly underestimated the duration of the substance’s hazardousness, thinking it remained so for decades or centuries.

Several participants in both Saskatoon groups linked the challenge of long-term nuclear waste management to the challenge facing the clean-up of uranium-mining sites. One participant in particular made the point that the ongoing environmental damage from uranium mining at Uranium City made the challenge of long-term nuclear waste management “look like a walk in the park.”

How well are we managing it?

No one in any of the groups was able to identify the entity or entities that manage Canada's nuclear waste today. Nonetheless, perceptions of how well Canada performs in this regard ranged from neutral to positive, largely due to the absence of any evidence to the contrary.

"I think they do manage [nuclear waste] well. We haven't heard anything."

"We have no choice than to trust them."

Who is responsible for how we manage nuclear waste now?

- **The Federal Government**

Groups overwhelmingly viewed the federal government as the senior authority on matters relating to nuclear waste and energy. Perceptions of its role ran the gamut of legislator, regulator, funding source, operator, enforcer and coordinator of any disaster relief effort.

"We trust those who have the information to take care of it. Not that we are passing the buck. We have our little area of responsibility. We have others to fulfill theirs."

- **Provincial Governments**

Cascading down from Ottawa, the provincial governments were seen generally as proponents of their province's interest. Mention was made in several groups that the provinces decide whether and where nuclear facilities will be built within their boundaries. A few participants recognized that provincial governments now own the nuclear stations or did at one time. A few others believed that the provinces decide whether their nuclear waste can be shipped abroad.

"If they own the plant, [the nuclear waste] is their responsibility."

"The people who produce [the waste] should know how to get rid of it."

- **Nuclear Power Producers and their Employees**

Participants generally required prompting on the role of the nuclear power producing companies (Ontario Power Generation, Hydro-Quebec and New Brunswick Power) in nuclear waste production and management. This was due in part to confusion over their public versus private ownership structure.

"If employees go into work, I figure it is well controlled."

"(Nuclear) plant employees know more than government."

Several participants in Pickering, Trois Rivières and St. John viewed the employees of these companies, particularly those working in roles related to safety, as important barometers of the care given to safety issues at the plant level. A few participants in groups across the country also referred to them as primary sources of information on nuclear-related matters.

- **Municipal Governments**

Local governments were seen largely as advocates for their communities

and as sources of information on dangers in their vicinities. Beyond these roles, they were viewed as lacking the expertise and resources to do much more. Participants in Saskatoon and St. John believed municipalities should be equipped and prepared to deal with a nuclear waste accident as those likely to be first on the scene.

- Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission
Only a handful of people across all groups were able to name the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission or its predecessor, the Atomic Energy Control Board, as the regulator of nuclear waste management, despite the general perception of the importance of regulation in protecting public safety.
- Ordinary Canadians
Participants generally believed that ordinary Canadians have a duty:
 - To know a certain amount about nuclear waste;
 - To monitor nuclear operations for their safe management; and
 - To exert limited pressure to ensure their continued safe management.

Participants expected such monitoring and pressure to be applied through elected officials, environmental groups and the media.

- International Agencies
Participants in a majority of groups considered international agencies as having a role in Canada's approach to long-term nuclear waste management. The United Nations and NATO were each cited as candidates for:
 - Global auditing;
 - Establishing safety standards in waste management;
 - Policing; and
 - Fining those entities that do not comply.

*“- Since it affects the entire planet, NATO or the United Nations should enforce the fines.
- Moderator: What about [Canada's] sovereignty?
- Participant: We've still got sovereignty. If we screw up, we're responsible to the entire world just like the whole world is responsible to us.”*

Associated events

Participants mentioned a range of societal events during the discussions. Their unprompted recollections provided additional insight into their mindset as the talks unfolded. In no order of priority, all of the unsolicited events mentioned across all groups were:

- The Chernobyl nuclear incident;
- The Three Mile Island nuclear incident;
- The debate on the proposal to dispose of Toronto's garbage at Adams Mine in Northern Ontario;
- The Walkerton water tragedy;
- The Spring Bear Hunt;
- The closure of the Triumf-Kaon lab at the University of British Columbia;
- The proposal to construct a natural gas-fired generating plant in the State of Washington near the British Columbia border;
- Federal Liberal Party promises to end the GST;
- The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States;
- Ratification of the Kyoto Accord in Canada;
- The War on Terror;
- Cost over-runs of the federal gun registry;
- Government cost-cutting and down-sizing generally;
- Energy deregulation and privatization;
- Nuclear plant shutdown during summer of 2002 and resulting higher electricity prices in Ontario; and
- Oil spill off the coast of Spain.

2. Emotional intensity does not exist

Emotions during the group discussions were subdued. A sense of concern tended to rise slightly during each group as participants searched among themselves for basic facts about nuclear waste. As they filled in their own facts, that concern continued to increase. The moderator's eventual mention of the several facts tended to calm many participants.

"Why didn't they think of this [how to manage the waste] when they built the plants?"

"I'm not an environmentalist. I'm just concerned. When is it going to start affecting us? When is it going to be in our backyard? This wasn't a concern when I was 19 or 20. Hit your thirties and you start to have concerns."

Those facts found most meaningful were: Canada's 30-year record of safe nuclear waste management; the amount of waste now in storage equaling the size of five hockey rinks as measured from the ice to the top of the boards; and the substance's hazardousness.¹

Most participants keyed into the volume of waste. Many said the actual amount was less than they imagined while a few said it was more. This inevitably led to an assertion by at least one group member that only a small amount of nuclear waste can cause a great deal of harm. For those of this view, the 10,000-year figure and the risk associated with a miniscule amount served to reinforce their fears about nuclear waste. In any case, people experienced little to no emotional connection to the issue.

"What I've learned tonight has been largely reassuring."

3. A basis for beginning a discussion does not exist

Low awareness, knowledge and emotional intensity made input on the issues unreliable since participants did not have a context for their judgments. Many expressed the need for more public education. Those holding this view spoke of their personal interest in science, nuclear energy or the environment; in better understanding the full cost of various sources of energy; the future of today's children; or assisting a child with a school project on this subject at some point in the future.

4. Facts only go so far in engaging participation

Much mention was made of public and environmental safety during the groups. Participants considered each of the three management options under NWMO study through a frame of what was perceived as 'safest'. Their assertions were circular however: every argument in favour of a safety feature pertaining to one of the management options was met by an equally compelling argument to the contrary. Of this, however, participants were certain: any solution to this 10,000 year challenge will be threatened by changing weather patterns, earthquakes or ground shifts, human neglect, mischief or abuse (such as terrorism), simple mechanical failure, perhaps even by the effects of the radiated material on the containers and vaults themselves.

In the discussions, the facts provided by the moderator that participants accepted to be true and real had the effect of bolstering their confidence and participation in the discussion.

"I see nuclear waste actually as a by-product of nuclear energy. And nuclear energy in my mind is much, much safer than having coal-fired plants in the province...that's creating a lot more waste. The problem is if you can find a way to take care of the nuclear waste from nuclear facilities I think in the long run it's an answer to a lot of our energy problems."

"It makes me more afraid, knowing the length of time it lasts and that there is no long-term solution yet and it has been 30 years. At least there isn't as much as I thought. It doesn't matter if it's above or below ground - it's still frightening."

¹ 10,000 years was used as the period of hazardousness for the purpose of this discussion.

People tended to ‘like’ and ‘agree with’:

- The existence of the legislation giving rise to the NWMO;
- The creation of the dedicated fund by the nuclear power producers to eventually pay for a long-term management approach;
- People now being in charge of the matter; and
- The variety of steps that would be taken in a process that includes two facets of regulatory oversight.

“We can find the answers to everything else. I think technology can find a way to manage nuclear waste.”

Participants who were most fearful of nuclear waste viewed shutting down the industry rather than keeping it going as an acceptable solution for managing nuclear waste over the long-term. This prompted a response from others on the implications of such a move for:

- The cost of electricity,
- Society’s continued commitment to maintaining existing nuclear facilities as safe, and
- The preference for consumer choice in energy sources, recognizing that all had their environmental impacts.

Several people in most groups rejected the notion that only three options for long-term nuclear waste management be examined over a three-year period. Their view was that it ought to be an ongoing concern until the means are found to rid society of the danger altogether. Re-use of the spent fuel waste, re-processing of it into harmless substances and its complete neutralization were additional options perceived to be worthy of study by those sharing this view.

5. American news and cultural media are key information sources

Participants typically referred to *The Simpsons* television program and the *China Syndrome* and *Erin Brockovich* films as contributing to their perceptions about nuclear waste. Other influencers that were identified included: personal connections with those working at a nuclear plant; tours or previous work at a nuclear site; stories in the news media; and the government.

6. Issue engagement is low

Overwhelmingly, participants didn't ever expect to have the ability to make an informed decision on this matter. The number and complexity of issues, the amount of technical information and the danger of nuclear waste *per se* were deterrents to their potential for participation.

Instead of seeing themselves as actively considering solutions to this matter, many participants were willing to extend trust to an entity, people and process that met defined criteria. These criteria are discussed in greater detail under '7. NWMO performance areas found to be important', below.

"I can't tell you what to do with it."

"You have to trust in something at some point because I'm no expert at this."

"I would not actively participate in this issue. It is a knowledge-based issue. It cannot find an answer just by discussion."

Participation In Response to A Decision on Siting

Sites under consideration for long-term nuclear waste management hold potential for higher community involvement. Many participants said they would engage on the issue only if they believed that their 'backyard' was threatened. A variety of opinions emerged, however, on what constituted their 'backyard'. The vast majority did not see themselves affected, since they perceived themselves as not living close to a nuclear facility or a possible site for long-term waste management or along the route to one. A few however defined 'my backyard' to include 'all of Canada' and still others as 'the world'.

Participants generally recognized that no community would invite a nuclear waste facility into their community. Some Vancouver participants said their interest in the issue would increase in support of a community that was selected for siting but didn't want it. Some Saskatoon participants could envisage a nuclear waste repository as an opportunity for areas that are severely disadvantaged economically or already suffering from environmental degradation.

"A lot of people seem to think, you know, the plant's here in Pickering, you should leave it [the waste] in Pickering on account of that's where the people get the benefits but the whole province gets the benefits."

As a consequence of the general view in the groups that opposition to siting would arise, participants felt fair compensation should be made to local residents affected by the siting decision. The process of being compensated should also be made as painless as possible for those eligible.

*"Participant One: Nobody wants it in their backyard.
Participant Two: Well it's in everyone's backyard."*

In addition to compensating those affected, some participants expressed the view that the waste be kept in the region, province and country where it was produced and not sent elsewhere.

Some also mentioned that a crisis involving nuclear waste and terrorism, geo-political de-stabilization or an accident anywhere in the world but particularly here in Canada could raise their participation in the matter.

7. NWMO performance areas found to be important

Participants did not see themselves as participating in the NWMO process. Instead, virtually all were willing to extend trust to an entity, people and study process perceived to be:

“Their decision should be made for the interest of mankind and our future - not a political cause or a money-making scheme.”

- Independent of government and the nuclear industry

The role of the federal government in reviewing and deciding the fate of a long-term approach recommended by the NWMO was the single most contentious item in all groups. Several factors contributed to a crisis in confidence in federal involvement:

- An over-riding concern among participants that politicians in general lack the expertise for dealing with this issue;
- The prevailing perception that politicians are more concerned with what is popular or, in the case of the current Prime Minister, with ‘legacy issues’ than with what is right for Canada;
- An equally prominent view that politicians can be swayed by lobbyists and industry; and
- Mismanagement of federal programs of which the most notable was the national gun registry’s cost overrun.

“Find the biggest, most eloquent opponent and put him or her on salary.”

“Have both for and against working together for a viable solution.”

“Don’t manage the problem. Solve it.”

“This is not just a Toronto/big city issue. It’s a national issue - avoid regionalism.”

“Science could invent something to destroy this.”

People in several groups also were concerned about possible conflicts of interest among different federal entities overseeing one another’s work.

The nuclear industry was seen by some as having a vested interest in the outcome of this process. This was perceived to cut both ways. On the one hand the industry was seen as wanting to put the waste ‘in someone else’s backyard’. On the other, its employees were known or assumed to be residents in the areas affected and therefore committed to finding a safe solution.

- Benchmarked against the world’s best

Many participants saw benefit in involving international individuals and organizations in the NWMO study process. NWMO CEO Elizabeth Dowdeswell’s contacts in the Canadian and international environmental communities were singled out as an asset that she brings to the job.

Many participants also placed value on the number and types of options for long-term waste management being studied by the NWMO. The three approaches contained in the legislation were presented to them. Those

who felt strongest on this point preferred that the NWMO be open to investigating both established and emerging nuclear waste management options for the long-term, including re-processing and transmutation.

- Directed by science

A range of scientific and professional disciplines was viewed as necessary to the study process. Those named were: nuclear science; the earth sciences including geology, hydrology, climatology and seismology; biology and medical science particularly oncology; and expertise in transportation, hazardous materials management, materials engineering and disaster relief expertise; as well as economics.

Universities were also viewed generally as having a role to play.

Ontario participants included employees working on safety at the plants as persons to involve in the process.

Equally important was the need to reduce the role of politicians in the overall decision-making process (see 'Independence', above).

- Led by an active and known CEO

Participants generally demanded a full-time commitment on the part of NWMO officials to its job. The role of the Chief Executive Officer was seen as critical to accessing international expertise, recruiting expert staff, and simplifying the organization's work and communications for ordinary Canadians.

- Counseled by an expert Advisory Council

Participants viewed the need for broad involvement in part as a guarantee of a quality solution and in part because the problem was seen to be everyone's. The specific call was to increase the participation of environmentalists, residents from affected communities, First Nations peoples and Western Canadians in the Advisory Council and in other aspects of the overall process. Some also saw benefit in involving entities known to normally oppose one another.

- Competently managed

Against this backdrop, respondents tended to have favourable impressions of the NWMO. There was a range of opinions however on the organization's mandate. Some viewed it as:

- Finding a safe, long-term solution;
- Setting guidelines, timelines and feasibility reports; and

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- Forming a panel of experts to come up with a solution to the problem.

A majority of participants though saw the mandate as being larger than that, interpreting it as being to:

- Ensure the safety of people's lives and their quality of life;
- Keep Canadians safe and protected from nuclear disaster;
- Protect the public;
- Stop the possible harm of the nuclear waste;
- Improve the image of nuclear power in Canada;
- Take care of the waste that we have in Canada;
- Get rid of the waste;
- Regulate the disposal of nuclear waste as watchdog or monitor of sites; and
- Find a way to reduce, reuse and recycle the waste that is generated.

Equally unclear among many participants was whether the NWMO would produce the 'perfect' or the 'best' solution. An approach that in and of itself was ideal was seen as different from one that required unspecified compromises to gain approval. Cost was perceived as a determining factor in this regard, although many stated that safety considerations ought to outweigh cost in importance in the final analysis.

8. Areas of NWMO discussion found to be of interest

Participants believed that now is the time for expert research, multi-party evaluation and public communications on the options. They were split on whether or not now is the time for final selection of a long-term management approach. Some believe it is something that has been left too long and should be dealt with now. Others said that more time is needed to determine the best possible solution. All were open to a long-term management approach if experts could show it to be safe for the full duration of the material's hazardousness, and other experts could verify this claim.

Two considerations appeared to drive their answers:

- Their views on nuclear energy; and

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- Their assessment of the urgency of the problem.

Many participants who expressed support for nuclear energy also identified benefits. They were more likely to believe that the waste is an acceptable trade-off in return for the electricity it produced. They also had a more positive view of potential solutions and were willing to be patient during the search for a solution.

A few in Thunder Bay and Vancouver mentioned the need to gain a better understanding of the true costs and benefits of various sources of energy.

Reasons to move and not move beyond interim practices:

Participants were also asked to speculate on the best reasons for and against effecting change in this area.

Their responses in favour of moving beyond the practices currently in place were:

- Existing sites are ‘getting full’;
- Population growth around the current nuclear facilities is encroaching on sites;
- Changes in technology that would allow the waste to be recycled;
- Actual or possible leakage from existing containers;
- Cost of the existing approach;
- Change in the political environment or public opinion; and
- Lawsuits.

Their views against doing so coalesced around a lack of urgency.

- *It’s not going anywhere.*
- *The present method is working. It’s being safe. Why spend time, money to fix it?*
- *I think we’re waiting for the Americans to solve the problem first...You’re a politician in Ottawa and you’re going to go and spend a billion dollars of taxpayer’s money on something that the Americans can’t solve? And they have more money in assets and brainpower to throw at this than we do?*

9. NWMO approaches found to be suitable

Participants stated an overwhelming preference for communications that projected the NWMO as “thinking out loud”. People in every group preferred the notion of progress reporting (quarterly was suggested to them) to only receiving information at the time of the NWMO’s submission to the federal government. They saw periodic updates as a practical means for educating the public and for demonstrating the NWMO as hard at work. The small number who preferred the opposite -- one time reporting at the end of the study mandate - believed the NWMO ought to retain the freedom to change its mind as new facts became available, sparing itself and the public from undue lobbying by special interests.

There was also a prevailing demand in all groups for bite-sized messages, reader-friendly language and ease of access to the material itself.

Preferred vehicles through which to receive information in the future included: the federal government, the news media, the Internet, the local library, the alternative press and environmental groups. Once the role of the NWMO was known, it was also mentioned as a preferred source.

“Help me to make an informed decision, not an emotional one.”

“Tell me how close to home it actually is.”

“I find it hard to trust! We have been lied to so often, it’s hard...If we follow the progress of the work they are doing, maybe we could have confidence. Confidence goes hand in hand with trust.”

“People are more afraid of what they don’t know, whether nuclear power or anything else. The more knowledge you have, the better, the more comfortable.”