

# NWMO's Ethical and Social Framework



## Background

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization's (NWMO) Ethical and Social Framework has its roots in the work of a Roundtable on Ethics, which, as part of its mandate, identified ethical standards and organized them into a framework to guide the NWMO's work. Rather than issue what could appear to be dogmatic statements, the roundtable designed the framework to express the ethical standards as a series of questions for the NWMO to ask itself. The NWMO has adopted the process of self-reflection outlined by the roundtable. The NWMO periodically publicly reports on how it has addressed these ethical questions in its work. Consistent with this, the NWMO has sought to lead a public dialogue on guiding values and principles in the development, review and implementation of its processes and plans.

The framework was first published in April 2004, when the focus of NWMO activity was the study of possible approaches for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel, and identification of a preferred approach for recommendation to government. Since this time, the Government of Canada has chosen Adaptive Phased Management (APM) as Canada's plan, and the NWMO's current focus is to lead the implementation of that plan.

Minor refinements have been made to some text in the original framework to better align it with the current phase of work. The current phase of work includes selecting a single site for a deep geological repository and Centre of Expertise with an informed and willing host, building supportive and sustainable partnerships with communities in siting areas in which the project may be implemented, as well as developing a program to transport used nuclear fuel from interim storage facility sites to the deep geological repository once sited.

The framework is considered a living document, and as such, it will continue to be reviewed and discussed with communities involved in the site selection process and interested citizens.

## Introduction

From its inception, the work of the NWMO has been grounded in an Ethical and Social Framework. First guided by the work of a Roundtable on Ethics, the NWMO's commitment is to embed ethics in all our activities in order to ensure that our work reflects the highest ethical standards.

### A. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Ethical principles form a foundation for our work – both the engagement and decision-making procedures we use and the decisions we make:

- » Respect for life in all its forms, including minimization of harm to human beings and other sentient creatures;
- » Respect for future generations of human beings, other species, and the biosphere as a whole;
- » Respect for peoples and cultures;
- » Justice (across groups, regions and generations);
- » Fairness (to everyone affected); and
- » Sensitivity to the differences of values and interpretation that different individuals and groups bring to the dialogue.

### B. ETHICAL QUESTIONS

The NWMO is committed to ongoing and public reflection on the processes we use and decisions we make related to each major phase of work. The NWMO uses a framework of questions to help achieve our ethical goals. These questions aim to identify basic values, principles, and issues inherent in that work and required to implement Canada's plan – both the procedures used and the decisions made.

#### NWMO's procedures

Ethical grounding means:

- » The right people are involved in decision-making.
- » Our engagement, deliberations and decisions are underpinned by ethical principles.
- » We can support our choices when facts are in dispute or unavoidably uncertain.

Ethical questions relevant to NWMO procedures are understood to include:

- » Who should be involved in decision-making?
- » What principles should guide engagement, deliberations and the making of decisions?
- » What facts are in dispute or unavoidably uncertain, and how should we address these in decision-making?

These general questions give rise to more specific ones. For each question, the principle(s) involved is/are in boldface type.

- Q. 1 Is the NWMO conducting its activities in a way appropriate to making public policy in a **free, pluralistic, and democratic society**? In particular, are its activities **open, inclusive, and fair** to all parties, giving everyone with an interest in the matter an opportunity to have their views heard and taken into account by the NWMO when the NWMO makes its decisions?
- Q. 2 Are groups wishing to make their views known to the NWMO being provided with the **forms of assistance** they require to present their case effectively? Will decisions be made by partners whose resources and knowledge are equitable?
- Q. 3 Is the NWMO committed to basing its deliberations and decisions on the best **knowledge**, in particular, the best natural science, the best social science, aboriginal knowledge, and the best ethics – relevant to the decision at hand, and to doing assessment and decision-making in this light? Equally, have limits to the current state of knowledge, in particular **gaps** and areas of **uncertainty** in current knowledge, been publicly identified and the interpretation of their importance publicly discussed and justified?
- Q. 4 Does the NWMO provide a **justification** for its decisions and recommendations? In particular, when a balance is struck among a number of competing considerations, is a justification given for the balance selected?
- Q. 5 Is the NWMO conducting itself in accord with the **precautionary approach**, which first seeks to **avoid harm and risk of harm** and then, if harm or risk of harm is unavoidable, places the burden of proving that the harm or risk is ethically justified on those making the decision to impose it?
- Q. 6 In accordance with the **doctrine of informed consent**, are those who could be exposed to harm or risk of harm (or other losses or limitations) being fully consulted and are they willing to accept what is proposed for them uncoerced?

### NWMO's decisions

Ethical questions relevant to NWMO decisions are understood to include the following. For each question, the principle(s) involved is/are in boldface type.

- Q. 7 Does the NWMO decision-making reflect **respect for life**, whatever form it takes, wherever it occurs, and whenever it exists (now and into the foreseeable future)?
- Q. 8 Is a reasonable attempt being made to determine, in so far as it is possible to do so, the **costs, harms, risk, and benefits** of the options under consideration, including not just financial costs but also physical, biological, social, cultural, and ethical costs (harm to our values)?


### C. WORKING WITHIN THE ETHICAL AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

The NWMO has built on this framework in the guiding principles and goals that underlie the site selection process and that are described in *Moving Forward Together: Process for Selecting a Site for Canada's Deep Geological Repository for Used Nuclear Fuel*. These principles continue to guide the implementation of the site selection process and work with communities. Work to understand the ethical dimensions of the decisions that face us as we implement APM continues. This work includes the development of programs to acknowledge the contribution of both Aboriginal and municipal communities to the advancement of Canada's plan. It also includes reflection on the principles, objectives and key questions that ought to guide planning for APM transportation of used nuclear fuel through a NWMO discussion document to foster broad conversation. The NWMO has also developed policies that build on and help implement the framework. We invite interested individuals and organizations to review and contribute to the NWMO's ongoing work.

- » Working within the Ethical and Social Framework, and through a three-year dialogue with Canadians, a preferred approach for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel was developed. View the material at [www.nwmo.ca/nwmo\\_study](http://www.nwmo.ca/nwmo_study).
- » Working within the Ethical and Social Framework, and through dialogue with interested individuals and groups, a set of objectives, principles and a decision-making process were developed to guide the site selection process. View the material and follow the process at [www.nwmo.ca/sitingprocess](http://www.nwmo.ca/sitingprocess).
- » The NWMO is currently leading a dialogue on the objectives, principles and decision-making process that should guide planning of the used nuclear fuel transportation program scheduled to begin in 2043. Be involved and view the discussion document at [www.nwmo.ca/transportationplanning](http://www.nwmo.ca/transportationplanning).
- » Values and principles to guide more detailed conversations about the project and future partnerships are currently a focus of discussion with communities involved in the site selection process as part of the Partnership Roadmap program. The Ethical and Social Framework is broad context for these discussions. View the material emerging from these discussions on the NWMO website soon.
- » The NWMO has also developed programs and policies to operationalize aspects of the framework in the way the NWMO conducts its work. These include:
  - Funding programs to support communities and Indigenous organizations to learn about the project and build their capacity to ensure they have the resources they need to reflect on their own interests and represent these through full participation in the site selection process. View program descriptions at [www.nwmo.ca/resourcestosupportparticipation](http://www.nwmo.ca/resourcestosupportparticipation).
  - An Aboriginal Policy, which guides the NWMO's engagement: [www.nwmo.ca/policies](http://www.nwmo.ca/policies).
  - An Indigenous Knowledge Policy, which helps ensure Indigenous values, understanding and approaches help drive and inform NWMO decision-making: [www.nwmo.ca/indigenousknowledge](http://www.nwmo.ca/indigenousknowledge).
  - A program to support reconciliation, and the respect and understanding this will bring into the process and decision-making: [www.nwmo.ca/reconciliationstatement](http://www.nwmo.ca/reconciliationstatement).

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