



NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION DES DÉCHETS NUCLÉAIRES

# Ethical and Social Framework



Founded in 2002, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) is a not-for-profit organization tasked with the safe, long-term management of Canada's intermediate- and high-level radioactive waste, in a manner that protects people and the environment for generations to come.

The NWMO has been guided for more than 20 years by a dedicated team of world-class scientists, engineers and Indigenous Knowledge Holders who are developing innovative and collaborative solutions for nuclear waste management.

Developed in 2004, the NWMO's Ethical and Social Framework is rooted in the work of a Roundtable on Ethics, which was tasked with identifying ethical standards and organizing them into a framework to guide the NWMO's work. The NWMO strives to embed ethics in all our activities to ensure that our work reflects the highest ethical standards.

Since we began engaging Indigenous Peoples and Canadians, we have used this framework to guide how we work with communities and make decisions. This is reflected in our programs and policies. Examples include our Sustainability Statement, Water Statement, *Indigenous Knowledge Policy*, *Reconciliation Policy* and *Proposed site selection process for Canada's second deep geological repository for radioactive waste*.

This Ethical and Social Framework is considered a living document. We review it from time to time as our work and the world evolve, aligning with developments in science and technology, input from communities and the public, insight from Indigenous Knowledge, evolving societal values and changes in public policy.

## 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 human beings and other sentient creatures, and minimization of social and environmental harm in all our work.
- » 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.
- » Sensitivity to the differences of values and interpretations that different individuals and groups bring to the dialogue.

## Ethical questions

The NWMO reflects publicly on the processes we use and decisions we make, using a framework of questions that help us live up to our ethical principles. These questions identify basic values, principles and issues inherent in our work, and include both the procedures used and the decisions made.

### **The 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:

- Q. 1** Who should be involved in decision-making?
- Q. 2** What principles should guide engagement, deliberations and decision-making?
- Q. 3** 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:

- Q. 4** Are we conducting our activities in a way appropriate to making public policy in a free, pluralistic and democratic society? In particular, are our 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 when we make our decisions?
- Q. 5** Are groups wishing to make their views known to us 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. 6** Are we basing our deliberations and decisions on current knowledge — in particular, natural science, social science, Indigenous Knowledge and 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. 7** Do we provide a justification for our 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. 8** Are we conducting ourselves in accordance 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. 9** 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?

### **The NWMO's decisions**

Ethical questions relevant to NWMO decisions are understood to include:

- Q. 10** Does our decision-making reflect respect for life, whatever form it takes, wherever it occurs and whenever it exists (now and into the foreseeable future)?
- Q. 11** Is a reasonable attempt being made to determine, insofar as it is possible to do so, the costs, harms, risks 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)?

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