

Community Engagement Session Summary Report – Ignace, June 17

The objective of the Integrated Strategy for Radioactive Waste's (ISRW) community engagement sessions is to invite and facilitate broad dialogue to develop a long-term strategy for managing Canada's low- and intermediate-level waste. We approach this goal by listening to the perspectives of attendees across multiple Canadian communities. The development of the strategy is grounded in a range of guiding principles and objectives as we explore key questions and issues discussed at our events. This summary report details what we heard from the participants at the sessions focused on the community of Ignace, Ontario.

The sessions began with a land acknowledgement, recognizing and expressing gratitude for the land that we are on. This was followed by an introduction and an overview of logistics for the evening. The event offered several opportunities for attendees to participate, give feedback and ask questions about various topics. Simultaneous interpretation in Ojibway was provided for this session at the request of some of the participants.

Attendees had some preliminary questions and comments to share after viewing our educational materials. We were asked to explain the difference between low and intermediate level waste. We responded by explaining that the main difference is that low-level waste is lightly contaminated and will need to be isolated for approximately 300 years, while intermediate-level waste will need to be isolated for a longer period. Participants asked questions regarding the long-term plan for high-level waste, and we explained that the NWMO is currently leading the implementation of a plan for used nuclear fuel, but that it is separate from our discussion this evening. We also heard concerns that the waste may not be safe in 300 years when we are no longer alive, and we highlighted the regulations and safety precautions in place to ensure that the waste will remain safe indefinitely.

Participants also had questions about a previous proposal to ship some waste to Sweden. However, this plan was for specific waste that could be mostly recycled, and we would still have had to store the remaining radioactive waste here in Canada. Multiple questions regarding the volume of waste being stored were also posed, and we explained that the industry is looking to reduce volume, but that waste minimization is not part of the ISRW scope. Safety was also top of mind for participants who expressed concerns about transportation, and they asked if our facilities were similar to those in Chernobyl and Fukushima. We explained that the type of waste being looked at as part of the ISRW and the facilities that we were considering for the long-term management of that waste in Canada were different and that conditions similar to those that led to the accidents mentioned could not occur.

Once the group entered the breakout room, attendees were asked to associate which words came to mind when they heard “the management of radioactive waste in Canada.”

In response to this exercise, we heard from participants that the management of radioactive waste should be controlled under one organization.

We asked if the attendees thought the following guiding principles addressed or reflected the most important aspects that a Canadian strategy for the long-term management of radioactive waste should include and what we need to ensure. And having heard from other participants, is there anything they would like added?

We described the principles that guide every aspect of the ISRW project and asked the participants to review these principles and tell us if anything is missing or should be modified.

Participants expressed that safety is of the utmost importance and that this project should absolutely be guided by that. We also heard that it may be hard to ensure the safety and security of a facility over 300 years.

We asked participants to consider the information we presented and this important challenge, and then asked, what is most important for us to get right when developing Canada's plan for managing waste?

We heard that transparency and accountability are most important. Concerns surrounding previous projects were expressed and participants highlighted that we cannot let projects disappear or be forgotten about, we need to keep track of what we start.

We asked in what manner should we deal with Canada's low- and intermediate-level waste over the long term.

We heard that transparency is the most important aspect of the management, and that people and communities must be informed. Participants also expressed that it is difficult to understand how dangerous this material is and asked what would happen if an individual picked up a parcel containing low-level waste.

We also heard several questions and comments regarding transportation. Participants were generally unsure whether moving waste from across the country to one facility would be best or if we should have multiple facilities near where the waste is produced. Some participants expressed a preference for having multiple facilities across Canada, but others believed that having only two (one for low- and intermediate-level waste and one for high-level waste) would be best. We also heard that transporting the waste north, into the Canadian shield would be the safest option, and participants expressed that they see a tradeoff between transportation and safety. Another concern surrounding transportation that was expressed by participants is that we need to protect all species, not only humans. We need to fully understand the risk of transportation before committing.

We also heard the viewpoint from some participants that storing the waste on the surface near the source with a rolling stewardship plan in place would be best for both low- and intermediate-level waste.

Participants also had different opinions regarding who should be responsible for managing Canada's low- and intermediate-level waste. Some participants expressed that an independent body should manage Canada's radioactive waste, citing concerns that the waste owners may focus on money and cut corners which could diminish safety. Other participants expressed that the waste owners should be responsible for managing the waste, but there should be an oversight body in place to ensure that the waste is safely managed.

Participants had some final questions as we approached the end of the session which were answered by Karine Glenn, Strategic Project Director at the NWMO.

We heard a question about other types of power generation, such as hydroelectricity. Does hydro produce waste as well? We explained that all types of generation produce some byproducts or waste, but we are unable to provide details on that waste given that it is outside of the scope of the ISRW.

We also heard a question about the safety of storing radioactive waste in water, as is done in other parts of the world. We explained that while water may provide a natural barrier, that is not a best practice for long-term management and is not something that we are currently looking at.

We closed the session by thanking our attendees & our Ojibway interpreter for joining us for the session and invited participants to complete our survey through our website at <https://radwasteplanning.ca>.