

Community Engagement Session Summary Report – Kincardine, May 26

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 session focused on the community of Kincardine, Ontario.

The session began with a land acknowledgement, recognizing that if this event were held in person, we would be on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Ojibway/Chippewa, and Anishinabek. 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.

Attendees had some preliminary questions and comments to share after viewing some of our educational materials. A question was asked as to whether one centralized management location was being investigated or whether the option of using multiple sites was still being considered. Others shared concerns that waste was not being recycled or reused, when possible, along with concerns surrounding the transportation of radioactive waste and where waste is currently being stored. The moderators reminded attendees that we are looking for their input on each of these topics before sending two groups into breakout sessions.

Attendees were asked to associate which words came to mind when they heard “the management of radioactive waste in Canada.”

We heard from attendees that when they think of radioactive waste, they think of how heavily regulated the nuclear waste industry is. Participants also shared concerns that the plans for this waste are not long-term enough. Several attendees expressed that they were mainly attending to hear other points of view.

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 audience to review these principles and tell us if anything is missing or should be modified. The strategy must:

- have safety as the overarching principle
- ensure the security of facilities, materials, infrastructure, and information
- ensure that the environment is protected
- meet or exceed regulatory requirements
- informed by the best available knowledge, includes Indigenous Traditional Knowledge
- respect Indigenous rights and Treaties
- developed in a transparent manner that informs and engages the public, including youth and Indigenous peoples
- developed and implemented in a fiscally responsible manner
- make use of existing projects

The general sentiment among attendees was that these guiding principles were clear, comprehensive, and well-rounded. In addition to this sentiment, we received feedback about additional principles that should be considered, including adding the actual process of storing radioactive waste as a guiding principle. We also heard that we should guide the process with a focus on advancing knowledge within the public.

We heard that some of the guiding principles conflict with one another. From the attendees' view, the storage of radioactive waste cannot be fiscally responsible and focus on security while also protecting the environment. It was also expressed that governments and nuclear organizations are overlooking the length of time the waste will remain on the planet.

Participants also expressed impatience with other radioactive waste projects in their communities and shared that they do not think we should be "flying by the seat of our pants" on such an important issue.

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 some participants felt our video presentations lacked substance and detail, which in turn raised more questions than answers. We also heard that, especially in a community like Kincardine, many people already had a base-level of knowledge and that we should take this into account during the presentations. Some attendees expressed that they needed a better introduction to radioactive waste to answer questions such as where is it currently stored, how is it used and reused, and whether it is classified as 'green fuel'. Several participants also wanted clarification on why we need an integrated strategy for radioactive waste.

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

We heard it expressed that low- and intermediate-level waste should be stored separately based on its individual requirements and that this would be the most cost-effective choice. Attendees reiterated that they needed to know more about where waste is currently stored and stated that finding sites to store intermediate-level waste can be much more challenging than for low-level waste.

We also heard that Canada must reduce the production of low- and intermediate-level waste and that this waste should be processed so it takes up less space. We also heard from some attendees that low- and intermediate-level waste should be stored in the same facility as high-level waste to add extra security and reduce the risk of disaster.

It was stated that our graphics were misleading and that low- and intermediate-level waste is much more dangerous than we are suggesting. Others expressed a desire to have this waste recycled when possible. We heard that participants were also concerned that citizens with little-to-no knowledge of radioactive waste were being consulted and that there was concern about profit in the radioactive waste industry. No one should be making money from this project, it should be the responsibility of those who produce the waste.

We asked attendees to look at low- and intermediate-level waste separately and asked if their opinion changed when focusing on each level individually.

We heard that clarification was needed on whether near-surface disposal was included when we refer to at-surface storage for low-level waste. Some participants expressed that transportation is likely the most dangerous part of this whole process and that, ideally, each site should store their own waste to reduce risk.

We asked attendees who should be responsible for the implementation of Canada's strategy for radioactive waste.

We heard that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) should be responsible for overseeing and implementing this strategy. Participants expressed that they have confidence in the CNSC as they already oversee the existing sites and have a strong track record for safety.

After returning from the breakout sessions, the attendees had several follow-up questions and comments.

We heard that since production is at the top of the waste pyramid and clarification was needed on whether nuclear energy was part of the government's green energy program. We expressed that waste minimization and reducing the volume of waste to be disposed of is important to all waste owners, not only in Canada but internationally. We also stated that questions regarding government policy should be directed to government officials.

Questions were asked about recycling radioactive waste, and we answered that current technology does not provide us with the ability to reuse much of our radioactive waste, in particular low-level waste. It was recommended that we include more information on the end-of-life for this waste and how the storage plan ends. We also heard from some of the participants that our discussion questions were too narrow and focused, especially the options provided.

The session concluded with some polling questions to gauge the opinions of attendees.

Regarding low-level waste, most attendees wanted to see the waste stored in a specifically designed facility as opposed keeping it at surface level. Most attendees also preferred the idea of housing the waste in multiple facilities close to where it is generated as opposed to transporting waste to a single location.

Regarding intermediate-level waste, most attendees want to see the waste stored in a deep geological repository or a similar facility as opposed to keeping it at surface level. Most attendees also preferred the idea of having separate facilities for intermediate-waste and used fuel.

On the issue of governance models for dealing with radioactive waste, the opinions of attendees varied significantly. We heard both that a separate organization should implement the long-term strategy for radioactive waste, and that the waste owners should be responsible for handling it. We also heard that safety regulations must be met, regardless of who is responsible for the waste.