ELECTION 2025 Northern Ontario

Questions to Candidates on Radioactive Waste

High-level nuclear waste is one of the extremely hazardous byproducts of using nuclear power to generate electricity. High-level nuclear fuel waste includes hundreds of different radioactive waste elements. Some of these elements – called radionuclides or radioactive isotopes – have a "half-life" that is quite short, meaning their radioactivity decreases in a fairly short time. But some are radioactive for millions of years, and many for thousands or tens of thousands of years. Even very low levels of radiation can be harmful.

High-Level Radioactive Waste and its Long-Term Management

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) is comprised of Ontario Power Generation, Hydro Quebec and New Brunswick Power, who were mandated under the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act (2002) to investigate and recommend a long-term management option for all of Canada's high level nuclear fuel waste. In 2007 the federal government approved the NWMO's "Adaptive Phased Management" approach, which gave the NWMO broad discretion to design a site selection process to locate a deep geological repository for all of Canada's high-level radioactive waste. The NWMO spent the following three years developing a nine-step siting process, which it launched in 2010. A total of 22 municipalities were the subject of NWMO investigations. On November 28th 2024 the Nuclear Waste Management Organization announced that it had selected the Revell site between Ignace and Dryden in northwestern Ontario as the site for the processing, burial and abandonment of high-level radioactive wastes. The NWMO proposal is still in the concept stage. NWMO says they will initiate the assessment process in 2025 and submit a full proposal in 2028.

There is no deep geological repository for high-level nuclear waste operating anywhere in the world, despite decades of effort by the nuclear industry. Some have been proposed and then cancelled, and others have been proposed and are under review – for example, the proposed repository in Sweden has been in the regulatory process since 2011 – but none have received full approvals or been brought into operation.

Question #1: Consent

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization spent three years designing its nine-step siting process, and it launched its site search in 2010, describing the process as intended to identify an "informed and willing community". The NWMO repeatedly declared that it would not proceed without such a community. In October 2024, Grand Council Treaty #3 chiefs unanimously passed a resolution opposing the DGR in Treaty #3 territory. On November 18th, 2024, Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation announced that they accepted further site studies but that they had not consented to the project. On November 28th the NWMO announced that they had selected of the Revell site - in the heart of Treaty #3 territory in northwestern Ontario and in the headwaters of the Wabigoon watershed – as their intended site. In December, Eagle Lake First Nation announced their legal action against the NWMO selection of the Revell site.

Concerned residents have identified three principles that they say must be met in determining whether there is a "willing" host to the project:

- Nearby residents and communities, downstream communities and communities along the transportation route must be part of determining "consent" prior to site selection being finalized.
- Nearby residents and communities, downstream communities and communities along the transportation route have a right to affect the selection of a burial location for all of Canada's highly radioactive nuclear fuel waste.
- The determination of whether a community "consents" to a nuclear waste repository must be measured by means that are fair, transparent, and democratic.

Q. Do you agree that these three principles are important in determining whether there is community "consent"?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

Question #2: Transportation

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization's plan to bury and abandon all of Canada's high-level nuclear waste in northwestern Ontario will involve 2-3 shipments per day with each truck hauling 35 tons of radioactive waste per trip for more than 50 years. Over 90% of the shipments will come from southern Ontario, averaging 1,700 km per trip, with most of those kilometres travelled on the poorly maintained and mostly 2-lane roads of northeastern and northwestern Ontario. The remaining shipments will be coming from the east – Chalk River in the Ottawa Valley, Quebec and New Brunswick. Again, mostly 2-lane roads, and – again – riding a road of radioactive risk that will cut across northern Ontario. Managing the wastes close to where it is generated would eliminate these transportation risks.

Q. Do you support the wastes being managed closer to the source of generation, and where shipments of waste are necessary, there being full testing of transportation containers, public notice of transportation routes, and support and training of First Responders from an agency that is independent of the nuclear waste owners and generators?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

Question #3: Transparency

Following the 2007 transfer of responsibilities for Canada's high-level nuclear waste management program – including research and development – to a corporation comprised of the nuclear waste owners (the NWMO), there are serious limits on the public or public institutions' ability to monitor the research and activities of the NWMO, beyond the NWMO's legislatively required annual and triennial report and occasional publications, all of which are summary and selective in the information they present. In their 2024 annual report, the NWMO claimed that their "Transparency Policy" is "aligned with all relevant, freedom of Information, access to information and privacy legislation". However, over the last two decades members of the public have been refused copies of reports, studies and safety assessments by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization.

Q. Do you support making the Nuclear Waste Management Organization subject to the federal Access to Information Act and/or equivalent transparency being provided through some other means, such as an amendment to the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

Question #4: Nuclear spending and the climate crisis

Canada is committed to cutting our carbon emissions by 40% to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030. The cheapest way to reduce our dependency on carbon-based energy production is through energy conservation, while the fastest and cheapest way to produce new low-carbon energy is with renewables – wind, solar and geothermal and retrofitting existing hydro. In recent years, the nuclear industry has attempted to rebrand by promoting "small modular reactors" as a means of reducing Canada's carbon footprint. From a climate perspective, new reactors would be too little too late, with even the first prototypes not expected to begin the multi-year construction process until the late 2020s at the earliest. With an urgent need to reduce our carbon releases by 2030, we simply don't have the time to test out another set of nuclear experiments. And we will NOT make the necessary progress in fighting climate change if we invest in these very slow, very costly, and very speculative technologies. Yet the federal government has been heavily subsidizing the development of these conceptual reactor designs, with no benefit to Canadians in terms of real action on carbon reductions or energy security. Investments must be made where they will count: efficiency, conservation and renewables.

Q. Do you support a moratorium on federal subsidies for nuclear reactor design, development and deployment?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

The questions are presented in an online survey format HERE. For more information visit HERE and HERE.