

Nuclear Waste and the Disposal of Such

Sponsored by: The Aboriginal Council of Manitoba and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples'

How and Why Should the Aboriginal Community Be Involved?

Background:

The aboriginal council of Manitoba (ACM) Inc. organized a meeting on September 24, 2005 to discuss: "How Can We (Aboriginal People) Be Part of the Solution to Manage Canada's Nuclear Waste?" It was a one day meeting and was held at the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, 715 Main street Winnipeg, Manitoba.

A total of 29 Aboriginal youth and Elders attended the meeting. The meeting was comprised of 8 elders and 21 youth (university and college students from across Manitoba). A few other Aboriginal people attended the meeting out of personal interest.

Sponsorship:

The meeting was sponsored by the Aboriginal Council of Manitoba, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) of Ottawa, Ontario and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO).

Focus of the meeting:

The focus of discussion was "What Should Our Involvement Be In Terms Of Nuclear Waste and the Disposal of Such?"

In attendance were:

Norman Meade facilitated the meeting.

Seating arrangement:

Participants were seated in a circle arrangement to allow for better participation and audible effects. Moreover, this arrangement is in-keeping with traditional and cultural teachings to demonstrate strength and unity.

Agenda:

As attached

Opening:

Elder Lawrence Houle opened the meeting with a traditional prayer. Following the opening prayer each person was provided with the opportunity of introducing themselves and why they were in attendance at the meeting.

Dr. Gordon Edwards, the president of the Canadian coalition for nuclear responsibility, of Montréal attended the meeting as the guest speaker. He made a presentation regarding the history of nuclear power and waste management. He used pictures to highlight some of the historical harmful effects that the extracting of uranium (mining methods) had on people and the environment. He noted that the extracting of uranium was for the sole purpose of producing nuclear weapons and reactors. He further noted that much of the uranium was for export to the United States. He further spoke on the potentially harmful effects of storing and transporting the waste. He noted the following three (3) options that are being considered for storage of the waste.

- 1) Deep geological disposal in the Canadian Shield;
 - 2) Storage at current nuclear reactor sites (in above ground containers);
 - 3) Centralized storage, either below or above ground.
- People had the opportunity to ask questions during the presentation.

Following the presentation people rejoined the circle to discuss the topic of nuclear waste and how the Aboriginal community should be involved.

The facilitator invited people to speak on or present their views in written form on "How We, as an Aboriginal Community, should be involved in the discussion of nuclear waste?"

Legislative authority for Aboriginal people involvement:

Under **The Nuclear Fuel Waste Act (NFWA)** of Canada section 12 (7) of the act references that the waste management organization shall consult the general public, **and in particular Aboriginal peoples**, on each of the proposed approaches. The study must include a summary of the comments received by the waste management organization as a result of those consultations. (Draft study report Choosing A Way Forward page 179)

Note: The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) is a non-profit corporation that was created to fulfill the mandate as required under the act.

Moreover, it should be noted that **NWMO** is governed by a board of directors. It is under the governance of the board that the **NWMO** carries out the managerial, financial and operational activities to implement the long-term management of nuclear waste.

More specifically, the board appoints a president who is responsible for the organization's planning, program design, direction and day-to-day operations. The board also appoints a **CEO** who is accountable for the operation of the corporation.

It should also be noted that the board believes it should expand the board membership to include independent directors so as to help address the expressed public concern... and to reflect evolving good governance practices. Currently, the board is comprised largely of industry-based members (ref. Draft study report choosing a way forward page 180). See **recommendation # 8 below**.

The recommendations that came out of the meeting are as follows:

- Our long-term goal is to be able to phase out the use of nuclear energy, hence nuclear waste, since there is no clear solution as to what to do with the waste.
- We do not agree with storage of nuclear waste in underground storage facilities because of the potential pollution of the land and underground water streams. Note: it was suggested that this recommendation be brought to the attention of our national Aboriginal leaders/organizations.
- As consumers of energy, especially of electrical power, it is of utmost importance that we take personal responsibility to not over use electrical power. It was further suggested that as Aboriginal people we use more traditional methods to help conserve energy.
- There must be a continuous education process in place regarding nuclear power and the disposal of the waste for the Aboriginal community. It was recommended that the subject be part of the high school curriculum; such that, Aboriginal students become prepared to meet the challenges of courses on the subject offered by colleges and universities.

- That the Aboriginal community (grassroots level) be given the opportunity of working together through town hall and community meetings on this important topic. Such gatherings should include elders and youth (students).
- That a process be established to allow Aboriginal elders to educate others, Aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, on traditional customs, values and teachings regarding the preservation of mother earth.
- That governments and private industry explore alternate means of producing fuels and energy sources, such as wind, solar, and other renewable resources.
- That the Aboriginal community be represented at the board of director level by an Aboriginal person. However, it was recommended that the nuclear waste industry do not put Aboriginal representatives in the position to undermine their participation in the community. Those persons be cautioned when becoming involved in talks about nuclear waste and the disposal of such e.g. be cautious not to "sell out".
- That the Aboriginal communities use the Aboriginal media, such as the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), Native Communications Incorporated (NCI) radio station, and various Aboriginal newspapers in Manitoba whenever possible to inform the general public of their position on this matter e.g. nuclear waste. It was felt that the Aboriginal media represents our views more fairly and accurately than the non-aboriginal media.
- That the Aboriginal community (grassroots level) be encouraged to make written submissions to the federal government and NWMO regarding the production of nuclear power and waste.
- That the Aboriginal community, in partnership with the NWMO and other concerned groups, explore other and all avenues of getting young Aboriginal people more involved in discussions regarding the effects of nuclear power and waste.
- That Aboriginal parents be encouraged and assisted to educate their children and grandchildren regarding nuclear power and waste by using printed material and other educational resources in the home.
- That Aboriginal people be encouraged to explore and use other forms of alternate fuels, such as wood and other renewable resources, since gas and oil resources are being depleted.

- That Aboriginal students be encouraged to enter into the fields of science and technology study so they can help make the world a better and safer place to live for the long term.
- That as Aboriginal communities/nations we take whatever action may be necessary to prevent capitalism from destroying mother earth.
- That we stop the extraction of uranium from mother earth for purposes of nuclear power.

Conclusion:

It is safe to conclude by the participation of the Aboriginal elders and youth (students) and others who attended the meeting on September 24, 2005, along with the foregoing recommendations, that the Aboriginal community **must** be involved in the on-going discussions regarding nuclear waste. By legislation our involvement is entrenched; moreover, as a result of this meeting the community (Youth & Elders) has made it clear that Aboriginal involvement is a priority. Furthermore, this relationship building phase is important that the Nuclear industry recognize Aboriginal right to self-determination; and investment in future, long-term involvement via community participation and investment in educational institutions and Aboriginal organizations who promote nuclear science education in the Aboriginal community is critical to this long-term strategy.

Secondly, it is worthy to note that some of the recommendations respectfully submitted in this report are consistent with those submitted by other organizations and community groups.

Finally, it goes without saying, that because of the legislative requirements under **The Nuclear Fuel Waste Act Of Canada** and the mandate of the **Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO)** the expectation of the Aboriginal community, and in particular the **Aboriginal Council of Manitoba Inc.**, is that NWMO will provide on-going funding for the purpose of involving Aboriginal people (at the grassroots level) in future discussions on nuclear waste management.

Report submitted on October 4, 2005 by Norman Meade, facilitator and consultant.