

Nuclear Waste Management Organization

‘Drawing on Aboriginal Wisdom’

A workshop on traditional knowledge

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Saskatoon

Workshop Summary

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Workshop organization

- ◆ The first part of the workshop addressed the traditional Aboriginal management systems of the past
- ◆ The second part addressed recommendations on how to incorporate aspects of these systems in the management of nuclear fuel waste and in the NWMO process

Traditional Management Principles

- Respect
- Honor
- Conservation
- Sharing involved reciprocity: giving to each other and to mother earth
- Consideration of the prophecies was part of the process



Traditional Management Principles



- ◆ The whole cycle of resource use was planned from harvesting to dealing with “waste” – whatever that may be
- ◆ Elders provided guidance & advice, leaders were accountable to elders

Traditional Management Principles

- Prepared future generations to deal with the ‘cleansing’ to come as set out in the prophecies
- Participation, transparency and accountability for choices
- Collective, not individual benefits were considered in both short and long term on matters affecting the whole community



Traditional management principles



- ◆ Protocols were in place to protect the integrity of the management system
- ◆ Learning from past experience was expected
- ◆ Leaders were expected to take full responsibility for action

Traditional Decision Making Processes

- Praying for assistance to make good decisions was part of the process
- Prevention of problems was required
- In Inuit communities the order of speakers was determined based on the subject and who had the most to contribute



Traditional Decision Making Processes

- Wisest/oldest elders spoke first, so others would benefit from their experience
- Decisions affecting the whole community involved the whole community
- Decisions were made in a spiritual environment and therefore were seen as sacred carrying great weight



Traditional Decision Making Process



- The authority of the people was enforced through the establishment of laws
- Consequences of breaking traditional laws were clearly understood

Factors affecting choices traditionally...



- ◆ Consideration of impacts on future generations (ie 7 generation teachings)
- ◆ Holistic-consideration of impacts on spirits, medicines, wildlife - on all life not just humans
- ◆ All factors weighed not just economics
- ◆ Capacity to deal with the effects of our choices (ie waste or by-products)

Who was involved traditionally...

- ◆ Elders
- ◆ Specialists
- ◆ Medicine people
- ◆ Leaders
- ◆ Those directly impacted
- ◆ The whole community if the whole community would be affected



Applying Traditional Knowledge and Practices

The workshop then focused on providing recommendations on how TK and traditional Aboriginal practices should be applied to the NWMO process and to the long term management of nuclear fuel waste

Participation of National Organizations

- Representatives from the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples made presentations regarding their own related initiatives and clarified that they were present as observers and would take back workshop results to their constituents

Recommended Procedures and Protocols



- ◆ Respect the roles of national aboriginal organizations
- ◆ Approach both modern aboriginal governments and the traditional leaders
- ◆ Consider an accord based on preliminary draft produced in the workshop
- ◆ Respect diversity

Procedures and Protocols



- Develop a relationship based on reciprocity and think about what the community will get out of their participation
- Allow the respective/affected communities to bring forward traditional knowledge in a manner that they are comfortable with

Who must be involved...

- ◆ The ‘whole’ community, not just leaders
- ◆ Ensure that communities are not fragmented by the process used
- ◆ Invite the oldest elders to speak first



Who must be involved...



- Ensure that local and regional aboriginal rights agreements are not breached and the designated organizations are included
- ◆ Empower communities through the process
- ◆ Recognize that structures vary between First Nation, Inuit & Metis communities -they have the right to determine **them (what?)**

Who must be involved...

- Recognize that national representatives need to consult their communities and organizations before they can speak on their behalf
- Ensure that Elders are always consulted
- Recognize that contamination from nuclear waste can affect everyone and everywhere within a community
- Provide information in the local aboriginal language and use audio and visual aids to increase understandings
- Respect existing management structures of the communities

TK Research

- ◆ Support community research capacity building
- ◆ Research should be initiated and controlled by community
- ◆ Research should be carried out by aboriginal people
- ◆ Acknowledge the cultural and spiritual context of TK information provided
- ◆ Permission to use TK shall be secured from the holders



TK Research



- ◆ Respect the need for intellectual property rights protection
- ◆ Recognize the importance of building trust and respect
- ◆ Need to contribute to rebuilding community TK capacity
- ◆ Recognize the need for Aboriginal peoples to set appropriate TK research standards

TK Research

- ◆ TK should be presented in a way as to be comprehensible by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples
- ◆ Review the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommendations



TK in NWMO process...

- ◆ The NWMO process needs to find a way to give back to Mother Earth and heal the damage both physically and spiritually
- ◆ Active Aboriginal participation in each stage of the NWMO process
- ◆ One person felt that aboriginal people were not involved in creating the problem of nuclear waste and it is inappropriate to use TK to find a solution



TK in NWMO process...

- ◆ Recognize that a people's 'world view' can determine sustainable use or environmental degradation
- ◆ TK should become public only when provider agrees
- ◆ Challenge science to find a productive use of by-products
- ◆ Fair and reasonable remuneration for participation of TK holders in the process



TK in NWMO process



- ◆ Knowledge interpretation skills and elders authority are required in verifying interpretations
- ◆ Pay attention to the prophecies that provide us with insights to make sound decisions
- ◆ Recognize that aboriginal peoples are de-colonizing and need to rebuild their own systems that have been damaged
- ◆ Ensure that treatment and interpretation of TK is undertaken in a manner based on respect and cultural awareness

The NWMO stages requiring TK...



- TK has a greater depth than just information – it is a source of wisdom and includes conclusions and recommendations, not just information and data
- Recognize the sense of responsibility that comes with traditional stewardship relationship

The NWMO stages requiring TK...

- TK holders should be involved in all stages
- ◆ The NWMO must be accountable for their use of TK and provide information of the measured impact of TK on the results in each stage of the NWMO process



What form of participation...



- ◆ Establish a joint committee with 5 national aboriginal organizations
- ◆ Establish a parallel process to existing process with links and communication between (the Wampum or co-existence model)
- ◆ Ensure that TK is considered in a manner equivalent to western-based knowledge systems

What form of participation...

- ◆ TK is holistic and can inform the NWMO process on many levels (advisory committee, ethics panel etc.)
- ◆ Veto over any decisions on aboriginal lands
- ◆ Help support the role of national Aboriginal organizations in the process



What form of participation...

- ◆ A full-time aboriginal communications person together with an ongoing link to a TK committee
- ◆ Build on capacity of National organizations and add a specific focus on TK
- ◆ Continue to seek out TK experts throughout all stages of the process



‘Consultation’



- ◆ The participants wanted it understood that they were not in the workshop to support the mandate of NWMO, nor were they there to be ‘consulted’
- ◆ Support the right of communities to veto waste management proposals that affect them

Closing Remarks

- ◆ Participants expressed their appreciation to the NWMO for the opportunity to participate early in the NWMO process
- ◆ Participants asked how the NWMO might use traditional knowledge and the results of this workshop to guide the study

Other concerns and recommendations

- ◆ Advocate the need to clean up abandoned uranium mine sites and contaminated areas
- ◆ There was an expressed need to build trust between communities, industry and government



Other concerns and recommendations

- ◆ Look at experience from other indigenous peoples with regard to nuclear waste management
- ◆ Advocate compensation for lands destroyed
- ◆ Advocate the establishment of a Federal TK policy focused on rebuilding TK capacity at the local level
- ◆ Call it 'by-products', not waste



Workshop follow-up

Participants were sent this presentation and the report in draft, their comments and suggestions were greatly appreciated!