Deputation to Thunder Bay City Council
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by

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on Behalf of

Environment North
Nuclear Free Thunder Bay
We the Nuclear Free North

RE: Concerns About Transporting and Disposal of Nuclear Waste in Northwestern Ontario

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Introduction

1. Thank you, Mayor Boshcoff and Members of Council, for allowing us to address a matter that will have serious, long-term consequences for our community for generations to come. We represent We the Nuclear Free North, an alliance of people and groups across northern Ontario, including Environment North and Nuclear Free Thunder Bay.

2. We are asking you to pass a resolution that supports our campaign to stop the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) from proceeding with their northwestern Ontario option for a deep geological repository for all of Canada's high level nuclear waste.

3. By the end of 2024, the NWMO will decide where it proposes to relocate more than 50,000 tonnes of used nuclear fuel waste accumulated over 60 years. By the end of the plants' operating lives, there will be more than 100,000 tonnes. The NWMO expects the site will also store nuclear waste from small modular reactors.

4. The last two potential sites for the DGR are Teeswater (South Bruce) in southwestern Ontario and the Revell site in the heart of Treaty 3 territory (about 45 km northwest of Ignace, ON, and 290 km northwest of Thunder Bay).

Risks in Siting the DGR in Northwestern Ontario

5. The NWMO plan involves transporting, processing, repackaging, burying, and then abandoning the waste. It will be stored in in an underground facility, 600 -700 metres deep, spanning an area of 2 kilometres by 3 kilometres, and will remain radioactive for over a

million years. Radioactive releases from this waste can be deadly, difficult to contain and extremely expensive to remediate.

6. For more than 50 years there will be highly radioactive waste transported through Thunder Bay to the site by road and or by rail on a route that passes through Thunder Bay. The transport option will mean 2-3 truckloads each day for 9 months spread over the year. Each shipment will release low levels of radiation, and a truck collision or train derailment could result in much higher releases with catastrophic consequences. There is no safe level of exposure.

7. There is a significant risk that there will be radioactive releases from the NWMO's operation, including from the processing plant at the DGR site, and from the repository itself. According to the NWMO, the Used Fuel Packaging Plant (UFPP) will have releases at the site. Liquid and solid wastes will be generated and there will be radioactive releases into the air and water from the UFPP. If all goes well, releases from the DGR will not come until later but there is no guarantee that all will go well. And once radioactive toxins enter the water course it will be too late to mitigate the adverse effects.

8. The NWMO reserves the option of initiating transport of radioactive waste to their selected site before determining if the geology of that site is appropriate, and before the DGR has received final approval.

9. There is no other deep geological repository for high-level radioactive fuel waste anywhere in the world that has been approved or brought into operation.

Why Should Thunder Bay City Council Speak Up on this Issue?

10. The NWMO states in its official plan, *Implementing Adaptive Phased Management 2024-28*, that one of its Guiding Principles for Site Selection is "**Inclusiveness**" and that "the NWMO **must respond to, and address where appropriate, the views of others who are most likely to be affected by implementation, including the transportation that would be required of used nuclear fuel.** Full opportunity must be provided to surrounding communities, provincial governments, Aboriginal communities and transportation communities as a large group with a shared interest to have their questions and concerns heard and taken into account in decision-making on a preferred site." [1]

[1] https://www.nwmo.ca/Site-selection/How-it-was-developed/Guiding-principles

11. Thunder Bay is the municipality with the greatest population in the vicinity of the Revell Site. Thunder Bay residents would be significantly affected by the transportation of nuclear waste along our highways or railways. The NWMO has not provided our city with an opportunity to have our questions and concerns taken into account in their site selection process. Therefore, it is incumbent upon our City Council to speak up on behalf of our citizens and communicate our opposition to transporting the waste through our city and siting the DGR in our region.

12. There has been strong and vocal opposition to the NWMO proposal to build a DGR in our region from multiple sectors, including several municipalities and First Nations, as well as from thousands of local residents, over decades. Serious concerns have been raised about the NWMO proposal to foist nuclear waste onto Northwestern Ontario, in terms of harm to human health, the environmental impact, lack of candid disclosure about risks, the legitimacy of the willingness process and lack of consultation. The breadth and scope of the opposition is outlined below in paragraphs 13 – 17.

13. Several municipal councils and leaders have publicly expressed concerns about transporting and disposing nuclear waste in Northwestern Ontario and not being consulted. Mayor Boshcoff, himself, recently stated that he would ensure Thunder Bay is included in the willingness process should further interest in the Ignace site continue.[2] Resolutions opposing the NWMO proposal to transport and bury nuclear waste in NWO have been passed by Nipigon, Red Rock, Lavallee, Chapples, Gillies and Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls.

14. Multiple First Nations, most notably Fort William First Nation, and Indigenous organizations such as Nishnabe Aski Nation have also publicly expressed opposition to this proposal.[3]

15. There have been over 75 letters to the Editor of the *Chronicle Journal* and TBnewswatch and regional publications objecting to the NWMO plan, raising concerns about transportation risks, the DGR concept and being shut out from the consultation process.

16. Thousands of people have signed petitions to Parliament opposing the NWMO proposal to build the DGR without a proper consultation process.[4] Another online petition has 13,243 signatures.[5] TBnewswatch conducted 2 separate polls in 2024. The majority of respondents were against Ignace being chosen as a nuclear waste repository.

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[2] TB Newswatch, March 29, 2024, https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/mayor-expects-willingness-process-for-city-8517386

[3] Fort William First Nation, Pic Mobert, Lac Seul, Grassy Narrows, Ojibway Nation of Saugeen #258 and Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resource Council representing 5 First Nations have all passed resolutions opposing the NWMO plan, https://wethenuclearfreenorth.ca/nuclear-waste-resolutions/

[4] The most recent petition presented to Federal Parliament in May contains 3,327signatures. https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-4852

[5] https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-disposal-of-nuclear-waste-in-northwestern-ontario?source_location=search

17. Thunder Bay ‘s 1997 plebiscite resulted in 91% of the voters declaring they were against nuclear waste disposal in the Thunder Bay area. In 2000, Thunder Bay City Council adopted a resolution expressing concern with transportation of nuclear waste throughout the City and advised appropriate Federal Ministers and local MP’s of this concern.

NWMO Site Selection Process is Unfair

18. The NWMO has stated it will only proceed in an area with “willing and informed hosts.” Willingness suggests consent is freely given. However, the power imbalance between the nuclear industry and the small, regionally isolated and economically vulnerable community of Ignace with a population of 1,200 is huge.
19. The site-selection process is not subject to regulatory oversight or legislation; it is a process made-up by NWMO. The NWMO has paid millions of dollars to municipal and Indigenous governments to engage and seek their support as part of its site selection process. This has led to accusations of governments being bought off by the nuclear industry.[6]
20. The NWMO’s “host” community of Ignace is 45 kilometres east of the proposed DGR site and is not in the same watershed. There are smaller communities closer to the site that are not part of the NWMO’s “willingness process.” While the NWMO is also seeking a declaration of willingness from Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation, other First Nations with land use near or overlapping the project area are not being consulted.
21. Despite living along the transportation route where Thunder Bay residents will have daily exposures to gamma radiation from the transports or train cars carrying nuclear waste, our community has not been directly engaged in a consultation process. It is not fair that we have been excluded from the willingness process, not informed of the risks, nor given a say in the process.
22. To be “informed” implies that information has been provided about the risks and benefits of being a host community. However, the NWMO does not publicly address the risks or the harms associated with radioactive exposure and contamination. Being the host site for all of Canada’s nuclear waste may negatively affect the community’s social cohesion and its image as a gateway to pristine wilderness, and “nuclear stigma” may lower property values.
23. Moreover, the NWMO plan to transport, process and bury high-level nuclear waste is not a complete plan. It includes a number of ‘concepts’ which are still being developed, and there are large gaps in the information**.** How can the residents be “informed” about a plan that lacks concrete details and material facts?

[6] David Suzuki, Science Matters, August 1, 2024, https://davidsuzuki.org/story/burying-radioactive-nuclear-waste-poses-enormous-risks/ -David Suzuki, world-renowned scientist and environmentalist, has strongly criticized the NWMO’s high-risk proposal to bury and abandon nuclear waste and its site selection process which has effectively excluded communities along the transportation route and those downstream from the repository site from the ‘willingness’ decision.

24. Northwestern Ontario is virtually self-sufficient when it comes to electricity. We do not rely on nuclear energy from southern Ontario. From an environmental justice perspective, we should not bear the enormous risk associated with having all the waste transported through our communities and stored in our region when the nuclear power plants have been primarily for the benefit of Southern Ontario.

Is there a better way? - Yes – Extended On-Site Stewardship

25. WTNFN and many scientific experts believe the best option in terms of safety is to construct robust, secure storage at or near the reactor sites where the waste can be safely managed until more advanced management techniques are developed.

26. We believe an acceptable waste management system must be evaluated according to the strictest safety criteria and should have the ability to:

- Monitor the condition of the containers;
- Measure the performance of the container integrity;
- Mitigate - if there is deterioration, it should be possible to intervene, retrieve, and repackage.

27. While extended onsite storage meets these criteria, the DGR involves sealing and abandoning the site, making it impossible to measure, monitor or mitigate should problems occur.

28. We believe it is important to distinguish transporting high-level radioactive nuclear fuel waste from the medical isotopes that are already crossing our highways. There is an astronomical difference in volume, frequency of exposure and toxicity of radionuclides when contemplating transporting existing and future supplies of nuclear fuel waste.

Conclusion:

Rather than holding wide public consultations, the NWMO's process has been fundamentally unfair and exceedingly partial to what the industry wants. Given the long-term health and environmental risks associated with nuclear waste, we believe a broader more inclusive consultation should have taken place, one that respected the principles of free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous people and included all potentially impacted communities. We believe a proposal with the potential for this magnitude of regional impacts should not have proceeded without regional input, particularly from communities along the transportation route and downstream from the proposed site.

There has been a significant outcry from the citizens of Thunder Bay against the DGR being built near Ignace and the waste being transported through our city. We hope that you are listening and will adopt a resolution to speak up for our community and demonstrate leadership for the region.

We respectfully request that you pass a resolution:

a) urging the NWMO to pursue the option of managing the used nuclear fuel waste closer to the reactor stations where the waste has been generated and is currently stored and thereby avoid the transportation of this radioactive waste through Thunder Bay;

b) to oppose the locating of the DGR in Northwestern Ontario; and

c) to communicate our concerns to the NWMO, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Canada, M.P. Patty Hajdu and M.P. Marcus Powlowski.