



NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION DES DÉCHETS NUCLÉAIRES

Indigenous Knowledge Policy

OCTOBER 2016



Introduction

Indigenous Knowledge recognizes that people are part of and are one with Mother Earth. Indigenous Knowledge systems emphasize the interrelationships among all components of the environment, and as such, believe Aboriginal peoples have a responsibility to be the protectors (guardians) of Mother Earth. It is a complex and sophisticated system of knowledge drawing on millennia of wisdom and experience. It constantly grows and expands with the experience of new generations. It is expected that this knowledge system will continue to provide a source of wisdom through the various stages of project development and implementation. As the project moves through the site selection process and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) engages with communities, there is an opportunity to learn from local Indigenous Knowledge.

The NWMO respects the value of what both western science and Indigenous Knowledge systems can contribute to the decision-making process.

Indigenous Knowledge, often referred to as “Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge,” has contributed to the development of the NWMO Adaptive Phased Management (APM) strategy through the sharing of Indigenous teachings containing values, ethics, principles, and practices.

Purpose

As the NWMO APM moves through the site selection process and the NWMO engages with communities, there is an opportunity to learn from local Indigenous Knowledge. The NWMO will build working relationships with Aboriginal communities to determine if and how the community wishes to share its Indigenous Knowledge. This policy is designed to set out how the NWMO will support communities, as well as to guide the work of the NWMO and contractors working on its behalf.

It is also designed to help ensure that Indigenous Knowledge in all its forms will continue to be valued and respected by the NWMO and included in planning and decision-making processes.

Scope

This policy applies to all NWMO APM activities.

Background

The development of this policy has benefited from ongoing advice and the education from the NWMO Council of Elders and Youth and its predecessor, the Elders Forum, and through the building of relationships with Aboriginal organizations at the national, provincial and regional levels.

The NWMO was established in 2002 in accordance with federal legislation, the *Nuclear Fuel Waste Act*.

The responsibility of the NWMO is to study, recommend and implement an approach for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel in Canada. In 2005, the NWMO recommended that Canada proceed in a deliberate and collaborative way to contain and isolate the used fuel in a deep geological repository in a manner that safeguards people and respects the environment, now and in the future. In 2007, the Government of Canada selected the NWMO's recommendation, APM, as Canada's approach for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel. The NWMO is now implementing this approach. Recognition of the important role of Indigenous Knowledge was embedded in the APM plan that the NWMO recommended to Government and that was approved in 2007, and is also a requirement of the environmental assessment approval process.

Be responsive to advances in technology, natural and social science research, Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, and societal values and expectations (Choosing a Way Forward, Final Study, NWMO, 2005).

Principles

The NWMO will be guided by the following principles in its work with communities and Indigenous Knowledge keepers:

- » Aboriginal peoples hold Indigenous Knowledge in trust for future generations in the belief that this knowledge must benefit themselves, future generations and all humanity.
- » Indigenous Knowledge continues to have relevance and value in decision-making processes today and in the future.
- » Aboriginal peoples have a sacred relationship and spiritual connection with the natural environment and have unique knowledge of and responsibilities for their traditional lands. This includes air, land, fire, water, plants, medicines, animals, and humankind.
- » Aboriginal peoples believe that all physical and spiritual life is sustained by Mother Earth on Turtle Island.
- » The NWMO will strive to ensure that informed decisions are made, in relation to the project, by Indigenous communities built on a foundation of knowledge from Elders, including Indigenous Knowledge.
- » Indigenous Knowledge, together with western science, is part of good decision-making when built on a foundation of trust and sharing of information in a respectful manner.

- » The NWMO acknowledges that consideration for the safety and security of humans and the environment, now and for future generations, is an integral shared responsibility and fundamental to decision-making processes with Aboriginal peoples.
- » The NWMO acknowledges that we all have a stewardship responsibility to protect and preserve the Earth for this and future generations. Aboriginal peoples have a sacred responsibility which is guided by the seven teachings as set out in the NWMO Aboriginal Policy.
- » The NWMO respects and honours that Aboriginal peoples have an oral tradition and ways of ensuring the validity of knowledge shared.
- » The NWMO will continue to honour the spiritual beliefs and practices of Aboriginal communities.

Policy

The selection of a site must be informed by the best available knowledge, including science, social science, Indigenous Knowledge, and ethics.

The NWMO commits that Indigenous Knowledge will inform decisions in each step of the planning in the decision-making process.

The NWMO will look to Aboriginal peoples to share Indigenous Knowledge with the NWMO to the extent that they wish. The NWMO will ensure that Indigenous intellectual property is protected, as agreed with the Aboriginal peoples who choose to share that knowledge.

The NWMO will work in partnership with First Nation and Métis communities that wish to share their Indigenous Knowledge and advice in the implementation of the site selection process, and in the design, construction, operation, and monitoring of the deep geological repository.

The NWMO recognizes that any collection or documentation of Indigenous Knowledge will be of interest to the community beyond the scope of the NWMO project, and the NWMO will agree to manage that information in partnership with the community accordingly.

The NWMO will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding or other agreements as may be requested by communities to ensure protection of Indigenous Knowledge.

The NWMO will provide support for Indigenous Knowledge engagement throughout all steps of research (including research capacity building), siting assessment and project implementation.

The NWMO will support the development of community steering committees that will establish an Indigenous Knowledge research and/or engagement process that will include Elders and knowledge keepers to oversee any Indigenous Knowledge work in their area related to the NWMO project.

The NWMO will continue to seek high-level policy advice from the Council of Elders and Youth and Indigenous governments on policy matters.

Implementation

The NWMO will strive to provide the needed resources to support Indigenous Knowledge research and community research capacity.

In order for the NWMO to successfully interweave knowledge systems, Indigenous communities need to be given the opportunity to research and document their knowledge.

Communities will be invited to submit an Indigenous Knowledge plan, which will describe how its research scope relates to the NWMO project, and set out a work plan, a description of methodology(ies) to be used, the reporting relationship to Indigenous governments, and a budget and budget explanation.

The research scope may contribute to the assessment of the safety and appropriateness of a site in areas such as:

- » Site evaluation;
- » Environmental assessments and regulatory approvals;
- » Construction;
- » Operation;
- » Extended monitoring;
- » Decommissioning; and
- » Post-closure monitoring.

And it will help in assessing:

- » Geoscientific suitability;
- » Engineering considerations;
- » Transportation safety;
- » Environmental protection;
- » Safety of humans and the environment; and
- » Social, economic and cultural considerations of community well-being.

The NWMO recognizes the value of members of the community, including Elders, youth and women, and will have effective opportunities to participate.

The NWMO will ensure clarity for the roles of all parties and management of information, including protecting specific knowledge identified by the communities as confidential and not available for public access.

Training and governance capacity lead to community empowerment through the research process. Offers to help develop local research capacity will be made through the provision of planning and program development support.

Agreements will be developed on a phased basis, which will build on existing studies and are consistent with the implementation of the project.

The NWMO will strive to consider multi-year support to communities interested in learning more to develop sustainable community processes for Indigenous Knowledge as long as there is participation in the site selection process.

Consistent with the NWMO's commitment to the enhancement of community well-being, the NWMO will work collaboratively with affected First Nation and Métis communities to ensure the use and enhancement of Indigenous cultures and languages through Indigenous Knowledge projects conducted in relation to APM.

The NWMO will work with Indigenous communities to establish agreements that are consistent with the Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) research policy and guidelines sanctioned by the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

