

# NORTHWATCH

Federal Election Candidates  
Northeastern Ontario Ridings

June 10

Dear Candidate:

Thank you for your commitment to public service, and your decision to run as a candidate in the federal election of 2004.

This is a critical time for Canadians, and a critical election, in many respects. One area of particular concern for residents of northern Ontario is a **long-standing proposal to site a nuclear waste dump in northern Ontario**. The notion first surfaced in the 1970's, and has been presented in several different guises - a site search in the 1970's, "research" drilling in the 1980's, and then a "concept" of geological disposal in the Canadian Shield, which emerged in the late 1980's and was the subject of a "concept level" federal environmental assessment which occupied most of the 1990's.

In 2002, the federal Nuclear Waste Safety Act came into effect, and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) was created to conduct a three year program to evaluate three options for the long term management of nuclear waste, including the "option" of burying the highly radioactive waste in the Canadian Shield. All expectations are that, if this option was selected, the next stage would be siting a nuclear waste repository in northern Ontario.

The Nuclear Waste Safety Act is clear on some points. It clearly puts the nuclear industry in control of the current research program, with the nuclear utilities occupying all seats on the board of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization and appointing all members to the NWMO's Advisory Council. Other important questions remain unanswered. Will there be a full environmental assessment of each of the options before a final decision is made? Will there be a program to reduce the amounts of nuclear fuel waste that is produced? Will potentially affected communities be given a voice in important decisions? Will Members of Parliament play any role in making the federal government's final decision?

Please take a few minutes and fill in the attached set of four questions on this important topic. We will be consolidating all responses received by noon on Friday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, to be published the following week. Please don't hesitate to contact me at 705 497 0373 for any clarification.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important discussion.

Best wishes,



Brennan Lloyd  
Northwatch





# Nuclear Waste and Northern Ontario

Nuclear fuel waste is the used uranium fuel from nuclear reactors. It consists of hundreds of different by-products, including very hazardous radioactive substances which must be isolated for millions of years. Even low doses of radiation emitted by the waste can cause cancer and other health problems. If the wastes leak into the environment, the radioactive elements will circulate through the soil, water and air, causing widespread contamination.

A proposal dating back to 1977 to bury nuclear fuel waste in the Canadian Shield (ie northern Ontario) is now being studied by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, which is comprised of the nuclear industries who produce the waste, namely Ontario Power Generation, Hydro Quebec, and New Brunswick Power. The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) was created through the Nuclear Waste Fuel Act, an act of federal parliament which came into effect November 15, 2002. The NWMO has 3 years to study 3 options for the long term management of nuclear fuel waste. The three options are: geological disposal, or burial in the Canadian Shield; centralized storage, either above or below ground; or continued storage at the reactor sites in specialized containers.

**1** Atomic Energy of Canada Limited's "geological disposal concept" was the subject of a 10 year federal environmental review. The Review Panel concluded in 1998 that further research was required and identified numerous technical and scientific flaws with the AECL proposal. The Panel concluded that the notion of burying nuclear waste in the Canadian Shield had not been demonstrated to be either safe or acceptable.

Do you support a full environmental assessment on each and any option being considered for the long term management of nuclear waste prior to a final decision being made?

YES  NO  UNDECIDED Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**2** Each fuel bundle from a nuclear power reactor weighs about 24 kilograms, and at the end of 2002 there were 1.7 million fuel bundles at Canadian nuclear facilities (about 40,000 metric tonnes). Without an early nuclear phase-out, an additional 2 million fuel bundles (about 45,000 metric tonnes) will be produced.

Given the long term hazards and costs associated with the perpetual management of nuclear waste, do you support a reduction of waste at source through a phase-out of nuclear power?

YES  NO  UNDECIDED Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**3** Moving nuclear fuel waste from its current location (at the reactor sites) to a new facility will impose a wide set of risks upon the communities along the transportation route and within environmental range of any nuclear waste facility or repository (eg. within the same watershed, or airshed, or wildlife range)

Do you support a community affected by a proposal for transportation or siting of a nuclear waste repository being given a meaningful role in decisions about a repository or route proposed near them?

YES  NO  UNDECIDED Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**4** As currently written, the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act requires that the Nuclear Waste Management Organization report only to the federal Minister of Natural Resources, and that Minister will select the "preferred option" after taking into account the recommendations of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization. Annual reports are provided to Parliament, but Members of Parliament have no identified role in making this important decision.

Do you support there being a full debate in Parliament and a free vote prior to the Government of Canada making its final decision on a "preferred" option for the long-term management of nuclear fuel waste?

YES  NO  UNDECIDED Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**Candidate's Name:**

**Party:**

**Riding:**

# Backgrounder on Nuclear Waste and Northern Ontario

## Nuclear Waste and Northern Ontario

Since the 1970's, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited has been researching and promoting the idea of disposing of nuclear fuel waste by burying it in the Canadian Shield. In the late 1970's and early '80's they investigated a number of northern Ontario communities - Massey, Atikokan, Kirkland Lake, Bancroft - as possible disposal sites, and did "research" near Atikokan and Massey, drilling the rock formations, with uncertain results. What was certain was that AECL's efforts were not welcomed by local residents. In Massey, a referendum was held, and 88% expressed opposition to AECL's "research" efforts. After a series of confrontations with local communities, the effort shifted in the mid-80's to a "concept" approach.

## Nuclear Fuel Waste

High level radioactive waste (also known as irradiated or spent fuel) is the used uranium fuel from nuclear power and research reactors. Each fuel bundle from a power reactor weighs about 24 kilograms, and at the end of 2002 there were 1.7 million fuel bundles at Canadian nuclear facilities (about 40,000 metric tonnes). Without an early nuclear phaseout, an additional 2 million fuel bundles (about 45,000 metric tonnes) will be produced. Thus total production could mount to 3.7 million fuel bundles weighing about 85,000 tonnes.

## The Nuclear Fuel Waste Act and Nuclear Waste Management Organization

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002, the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act came into effect. The Act is the federal government's response to the federal environmental assessment review conclusions, but in many respects created the mirror opposite of what the Review Panel recommended. For example, the Review Panel recommended that an independent agency be formed at arms length from the nuclear utilities, in order to manage the programs related to long-term nuclear fuel waste management, including detailed comparison of waste management options. It also recommended that the new agency be subject to "multiple oversights", meaning that there be a variety of means for the public and government to monitor and oversee the Agency's activities and programs, and a social and ethical framework be developed, and that an approach for the involvement of Aboriginal people be developed by Aboriginal people.

The AECL burial concept was the subject of a 10 year federal environmental assessment review and a 13 month public hearing. When the federal review began in 1988, AECL was undecided about many aspects of their proposal. The wastes will be buried in caverns 500 to 1,000 feet below the surface; in titanium or copper cylinders; in the containers used to transport the waste from the reactor to the site or in a specialized container; and with or without reprocessing before burial. The review ended in March 1998 with the Review Panel concluding that the AECL concept had not been demonstrated to be safe, and that the Canadian public did not support the concept of burying nuclear waste.

High level radioactive waste contains over 100 different radioactive isotopes. Even low doses of radiation emitted by the waste can cause cancer and other health problems. The waste is lethal and must be strictly isolated from the environment for hundreds of thousands of years. If the wastes leak into the environment, the radioactive elements will circulate through the soil, water and air, causing widespread contamination.

In contrast, the "Nuclear Fuel Waste Act" established a nuclear industry-controlled Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), with a mandate to review nuclear fuel waste management options. The NWMO has three years to study and then select its preferred option for long-term management of nuclear fuel waste and recommend that option to the federal Minister of Natural Resources. The Minister will then select the Government's preferred option, and refer it back to the NWMO for implementation.

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization is now almost mid-way through its three year mandate. Activities to date have concentrated on placing technical papers on a web site, holding focus groups to canvas the opinions of Canadians who are unfamiliar with the issues related to the long term management of nuclear fuel waste, and production of a discussion document.

This candidates' survey and backgrounder on nuclear waste and northern Ontario has been prepared by **Northwatch** for the federal election period of June 2004. Northwatch is a non-partisan non-governmental organization in northeastern Ontario, concerned about environmental and social justice issues throughout the northeast. For more information about **Northwatch** or about concerns with nuclear fuel waste and its management, please visit the following web sites:  
[www.northwatch.org](http://www.northwatch.org)      [www.cnp.ca/nww/](http://www.cnp.ca/nww/)      [www.ccnr.org](http://www.ccnr.org)      [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)