

The Fredericton
Daily Gleaner

DATE: 2005.11.12

SECTION: Opinion/Editorial

PAGE: D8

COLUMN: Q&A<

BYLINE: MARK TAYLOR Q&A<

PHOTO: SUBMITTED PHOTO

ILLUSTRATION: **NUCLEAR** WASTE DECISIONS: Elizabeth Dowdeswell, president of the **Nuclear** Waste Management Organization, recommends New Brunswick as one of the possible places to store **nuclear** waste.

New Brunswick would be a good place for burying *nuclear* waste

New Brunswick faces a decision that will likely impact the province for many generations to come.

The **Nuclear** Waste Management Organization (NWMO) recently handed its final report to the federal government. This body has been given the task of recommending to Ottawa where to store the country's **nuclear** waste. In its document, the organization named New Brunswick as one of four possible provinces locations. The other provinces include Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

Elizabeth Dowdeswell is president of the NWMO. She is no stranger to environmental and public policy issues. Her impressive career includes stints as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program and Assistant Deputy Minister of Environment Canada.

Dowdeswell says the **nuclear** waste storage plan would take at least 30 years and possibly more than 120 years to see the nation's **nuclear** waste find a home.

Dowdeswell spoke recently with reporter Mark Taylor by phone from her Toronto office about her organization's report, its implications and the reasons for placing the nation's **nuclear** waste in New Brunswick.

Q: Why recommend New Brunswick as one of the possible places to store **nuclear** waste?

A: It's for two reasons.

One, because in the interest of fairness, it's one of the provinces that actually produces the stuff and, consequently, along with several other provinces, it is viewed as being fair to consider. If we produce the waste, in fact, we have some responsibility for taking care of it in the long term. But secondly, the actual approach that we have developed had several phases to it. One of those phases would mean that the first phase would see the waste remaining at the site while we're into the process of site selection for the centralized site, going through the environmental assessment (and) at the licencing period. So, it's envisioned that phase one would necessarily keep the waste at site for some period of time. So, New Brunswick is implicated in that way as well.

Q: Do you have any suggestions at this point on where the waste could be stored in the province?

A: We have not entered into the site selection discussions at this point, other than to make the two comments.

One, that the four provinces that are involved in the **nuclear** fuel cycle should be the starting point for consideration. Secondly, that what's of most importance to us is, of course, that we would be intending to seek a willing host community. There will be technical and scientific criteria, obviously. But the ethical and social criteria of seeking a willing and informed host community is very important to us.

Q: For a person living in New Brunswick, why should he or she feel OK with having **nuclear** waste stored in their backyard?

A: First of all, the specific process and the criteria will be worked on in collaboration with communities. We'll be starting to talk about possibilities as soon as the government actually makes a decision. So, a lot of that is yet to come. Because we're very much promoting a collaborative process and we know from other countries that this is a process that takes time and it takes relationship building, we need to ensure that the process very honestly engages citizens in communities in the design of the process. And that's certainly what is what we want to do moving forward.

You had asked the question of why and I think that, in a sense, it essentially boils down to this culture of responsibility that Canadians seem to have and feel. There's been a very strong feeling, as we've gone across Canada the past three years, of Canadians saying we must not leave this (decision) to future generations. We've created this waste. It's our responsibility to start the process of dealing with it in the long term. Further to that, we have heard a very strong feeling that in particular in those provinces where the waste is created, is the place where they (Canadians) feel it makes sense, that it's only fair to say that's where the process should start.

For many individuals, it comes down to that ethical responsibility to look after the waste. And for those communities that even indicate to us a willingness to have a conversation, I think it's driven by that culture of responsibility. Certainly, as well, there are communities, I suspect, or individuals in particular, who can see that there are some possibilities for economic development. And people are convinced that the safety case can be made. As long as this material is safe, then they move to the next step which is to say "Maybe there are some opportunities for us in the community in which I live." So, I anticipate some people will have that discussion going on as well.

Q: But how could you explain to a person that the material is safe? A: You can say a couple of things. One is that the waste right now is in interim storage facilities that have been shown to be safe and secure. They are licenced by the Canadian **Nuclear** Safety Commission and there haven't been incidents of a breach of safety of the material for which we have had in place for many years now in Canada. That's part of it.

But part of it is also, because we're talking about so very long periods of time, is being able to ensure people that we have as many barriers and as many contingencies as possible to the best of the state of our knowledge to protect us from any unfortunate circumstances.

And that's one of the very reasons why we're suggesting in the long term that the waste is not only protected by the engineered barrier. By isolating it and containing it deep underground in appropriate rock formations that are not fragmented and are very secure over many periods of years.

Q: How significant of an issue is this for the country right now?

A: In most cases there are appropriate solutions for the short term that have been put in place.

I think we are getting to stage where certain Canadians have told us they're not comfortable leaving this decision to another generation. That is a question of stewardship and responsibility.

We can't continue producing this waste until we know what we're going to do with it