



Towards a Regional Siting Approach for Canadian Nuclear Fuel Waste

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Abstract

The proposal to construct a nuclear fuel waste (NFW) disposal facility in Canada is fraught with difficulties, particularly with respect to gaining public acceptance and consent. Public perceptions of risk associated with a disposal facility are generally negative. Indeed, it was found that over 60% of residents in northern Ontario communities are opposed to the possibility of a disposal facility being constructed within 120 km of their community. Even after being offered the possibility of compensation and incentives, the majority of residents are strongly opposed.

Canadian decision makers have generally endorsed a siting framework known as the open siting approach. The major characteristic of this approach is that it allows for substantial public participation in any siting process. It is premised on the notion that only communities where a majority of citizens favour the siting of a facility will be considered as potential hosts. However, given that the majority of residents on the Ontario portion of the Canadian Shield are strongly opposed to a NFW facility, the open approach will not be a panacea for a successful siting process. The major limitation of this approach is the fact that a single community cannot be isolated from its surrounding region and communities.

The purpose of this paper is to work towards the development of a regional siting strategy for Canadian nuclear fuel waste management. There are no clear precedents of a regional siting approach to facility location in Canada. However, some analogous planning regimes and initiatives have been attempted. Common to these initiatives is the consideration of a large geographical region and attempts to integrate, at least formally, social, cultural, political and environmental concerns in a coherent and comprehensive manner. Under this type of "siting strategy" NFW management would be considered within a broad array of resource management initiatives, social and cultural priorities, and institutional structures over a large geographical area.