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Terrace Bay looks into what's involved with acquiring and

Managing radioactive waste

By Dave Chmara

Hundreds of thousands of tons of low-level radioactive waste are just sitting around across the province of Ontario.

Most of this waste is located in Port Hope, Port Granby and a smaller amount is located in Mississauga.

At the present time, this waste is unmanaged - it lies in fields either with only small fences surrounding it, or without any barrier at all.

The government of Ontario, in Dec. 1986, set up a Siting Process Task Force to investigate and report on the most promising strategy for siting a low-level radioactive waste management facility in Ontario.

One year later, the task force recommended a five-phase Siting Process that adopted the principle of voluntary participation of communities interested in hosting the waste management site.

In July 1988, Cabinet accepted the recommendations and named a new task force, the Siting Task Force, to begin the co-operative Siting Process.

This task force has an 18 month mandate to:

- * establish the basic principles that will be followed in choosing a site for a low-level radioactive waste management facility
- * establish site elimination criteria

- * formulate impact management guidelines

- * identify the roles of key players

- * invite communities to participate in the process

- * engage in province-wide information and consultation activities

- * discuss siting possibilities with potential volunteer communities.

At the end of the 18 months, in March 1990, the task force will report to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources with details on interested communities, potential technological options and related costs, and impact management considerations, including community requests for compensation.

Terrace Bay requests more information

Following a regional information session, Terrace Bay Council requested a public information meeting be held in Terrace Bay by the Siting Task Force.

The meeting was held July 25 with councillors and about a dozen interested citizens showing up.

Three members of the Task Force Siting Secretariat were on hand to provide a wide assortment of information regarding the proposed waste management facility.

Wendy Bell, mayor of Marathon, Lorraine Gailey and Geraldine Underdown, both technical advisors, fielded questions on everything from the actual level of radiation to how the waste will be contained.

Bell said the level of radiation if a person lived right on the edge of the site, 24-hours a day, 365 days of the year, would be equivalent to about 1/2 of a chest X-ray.

A one-metre thick wall of concrete would stop all radiation particles and there are a number of other materials that could do the job.

Nine deep football fields

Presently, there are 900,000 cubic metres of low-level radioactive waste in Ontario. Most of it is soil that has been contaminated and it would be treated as such when being removed.

This amount of waste is equivalent to 44,000 tandem truck loads, or nine football fields 30 feet deep.

The site would take up an area of anywhere from 100 to 300 acres depending upon the type of containment site chosen.

Throughout the meeting it was noted several times that any community can opt out of the siting

process at any time and also by having information sessions this in no way commits the community to accepting the waste management facility.

In attempting to locate a site for the low-level radioactive waste, Bell said the government is trying a new approach. Instead of using the DAD system of the past - Decide where the site will be located, Announce the decision, and Defend the choice - they are using the approach of having communities volunteer to have the facility located in their town. This new process will also allow the community to directly participate in the entire process. Everything from the site, the technology used, and the compensation to be paid to the community will be decided upon by its citizens.

Should Terrace Bay decide it may be interested in this facility, the next step would be to form a group to act as a liaison between the town and the Siting Task Force. More detailed information would be gathered by this group.

What is low-level radioactive waste?

Some examples of low-level radioactive waste are: uranium mine tailings, wastes resulting from the production of man-made radioisotopes and/or the genera-

tion of nuclear power. These two types are generally large volumes of bulk contaminated soil, slags and cinders containing radioactive contaminants which are left behind after processing the raw materials.

The third category is made up of much smaller volumes of such items as slightly contaminated garbage from laboratories, and building materials from demolished industrial complexes where processing of radioactive elements was carried out in the past.

In determining the safety of such a facility, and the impact it would have on the community, the task force has put together a list of experts. The community can choose anyone from this list, or anyone else they want, to study the impacts the facility would have on the community.

Bell said the task force will pay for any costs involved in such a study.

To date, 18 communities have requested public presentations such as the one that was held in Terrace Bay.

Once the site is chosen, the Atomic Energy Control Board will retain jurisdiction and will carry out ongoing monitoring of the site.

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