

Principles of Radioactive Waste Management

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In 1994, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [said](#) “*The objective of radioactive waste management is to deal with radioactive waste in a manner that protects human health and the environment now and in the future without imposing undue burdens on future generations.*”

The IAEA’s [nine principles](#) include protecting human health and the environment, avoiding burdens on future generations, waste minimization, and independent regulation.

Another [IAEA document](#) lists additional basic principles such as transparency, security, non-proliferation, continual improvement, and long-term commitment.

Canada’s [Radioactive Waste Policy Framework](#) lacks a similar set of principles. It has no overall objective for managing radioactive waste. It assigns the federal government the responsibility for radioactive waste policy, regulation and oversight, and says that waste owners must fund and operate waste facilities in accordance with the polluter pays principle. It refers to waste “disposal” but does not address waste storage, or long-term management options other than disposal.

A [Joint Declaration between the Anishinabek Nation and the Iroquois Caucus on the transport and abandonment of radioactive waste](#) contains five principles -- No Abandonment; Monitored and Retrievable Storage; Better Containment, More Packaging; Away from Major Water Bodies; No Imports or Exports – that should be considered for inclusion in federal waste policy.

Federal waste policy should address Article 29(2) of the [U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) that states “no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.”

Additional topics to be considered in radioactive waste policy are restriction or bans on reprocessing of irradiated fuel and on uranium enrichment. Both of these alter the nature of spent fuel and create unique waste management challenges.

Wastes from uranium mines and uranium processing facilities also create unique management challenges and must be specifically addressed in national policy.

The IAEA document [Policies and Strategies for Radioactive Waste Management](#), notes that “the line separating policy from strategy is not always sharp,” and “policy makers might include a requirement for a particular management method directly into national policy.” Issues such as bans on surface disposal of radioactive waste or permanent waste disposal at reactor sites (“*in-situ* decommissioning”), and examination of alternatives to disposal (such as hardened on-site storage of used fuel) should be considered in policy development.

Visit www.nuclearwastewatch.ca for additional information about the current review of Canada’s radioactive waste policy, including notices of upcoming events, comment opportunities and information to support public participation.

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