



## BACKGROUND

A history of biased public opinion research

### **OPG's exaggerated claims of support**

Ontario Power Generation's incredulous claim that a majority of people in Ontario support the concept of disposing of nuclear waste on the shore of Lake Huron is yet another example of highly distorted public opinion polling.

As part of the legal requirement to find a willing host community for the permanent storage of nuclear waste, Ontario Power Generation entered into an agreement with the town of Kincardine to pay \$35 million to Kincardine and adjacent municipalities for public support of the project. One of the ways Kincardine was expected to demonstrate public support, was through a public opinion survey.

To earn this support, a telephone survey of permanent residents was conducted in in order to meet the OPG deadline.

“There was a three-way bias in the methodology and reporting of this survey which I believe would cause any professional pollster to reject the findings outright” said local property owner Robin Palin, a former journalist with more than 30 years experience in communications and public opinion research. “The sample of respondents was highly skewed to include people employed in the power sector and the preamble to the question led to a favourable response by omitting important known facts and in reporting the results, council claimed 73 percent public support for the proposed project, which it clearly did not have.”

Local media concurred. Phil McNichol, a reporter for the nearby Owen Sound Sun Times wrote “had anyone asked me how I thought Kincardine residents would respond (to the project) . . . I would have said ‘it’s a slam dunk.’”

“By that I mean I would have regarded it as a foregone conclusion that the vast majority of people in the community would say a resounding yes’ to the \$800 million Deep Geologic Repository (DGR) proposal” McNicol wrote, considering that 3,500 people work at the

nearby nuclear plant. Kincardine, home to the world's largest nuclear power facility, is a community of 12,000 people.

In his news report, McNicol then went on to ask why council felt it so necessary to distort the results of the survey and why did they feel it necessary to influence the outcome with a heavily weighted preamble?

## Highly biased preamble

Before being asked the question, respondents were read the following statement: "Council's decision (to support the project) was based on the following key points: it provides the highest level of safety of any option; there will be a rigorous environmental assessment and Canadian Nuclear Safety Regulatory process that includes opportunity for public input before construction is approved; the deep geologic repository will permanently isolate the low level and intermediate level waste stream, much of which is already stored on site; it provides significant economic benefit to the residents of the municipality; and no high level waste or used nuclear fuel would be allowed in the facility.

In summary, council believes it is important to solicit the views of residents."

Two highly salient facts were not mentioned in the preamble. Every attempt at burying nuclear waste has failed to contain the highly toxic radioactive waste. Secondly, council was in possession of a study commissioned by the municipality into the economic impact of the DGR on the community. The study, conducted by the Ivey School of Business showed the exact opposite of council's claim that the DGR would provide significant economic benefit to the residents of the community. The Ivey Report stated the DGR would result in a loss of almost \$700 millions to Kincardine's land base and enterprise value —a loss that would be shared among property owners in the municipality.

Following this highly biased and untrue preamble, the respondents were asked the following question: "Do you support the establishment of a facility for the long term management of low and intermediate level waste at the Western Waste Management Facility?"

Even the question itself is dishonest. It clearly states "long term management". In fact the DGR will have no long-term management. It is planned as a dump containing radioactive waste. While its contents will remain highly radioactive for 100,000 years, OPG plans to stop monitoring its contents after 30 years. In testimony, the former head scientist of OPG's nuclear program likened that to a ticking time-bomb.

Considering the sample skewed by the predominance of OPG employees and the half-truth in the preamble, it is not surprising the results showed support for the project. What surprised McNicol is how weak the actual support was.

Kincardine council in reporting on the survey claimed 73 percent favourable public support for the project. Actually, 40 percent of respondents did not support the project.

OPG said that of 6,778 respondents to the survey, 4,054 said yes, 1,477 said no, 874 were neutral and 373 did not know what to think or did not answer.

In fact, just 60 percent who were asked the question said yes. Some 40 percent failed to support the project: including 22% who said 'No' 13% who were neutral and 5% who didn't know or refused to respond.

For the above reason and for many others reasons, SOS Great Lakes rejects outright, the entire public consultation process.

"The government has a requirement for a willing host community for the storage or disposal of the nuclear waste, but we reject outright OPG's definition of a community," SOSGL President Jill Taylor explains.

"Kincardine is not some isolated, land-locked community, simple geography expands the definition of local community. The site of this proposed nuclear waste dump is on the shoreline of a one of the largest lakes in the world, straddling the border of two nations – the lake is the centerpiece of a fresh water basin that serves 40 million people in two countries. Surely all of those people whose supply of water could be contaminated by this project, not just in the short term but for the next 100,000 years, also deserve to be consulted."

We believe the government of Canada should recognize that fact and should ensure all related communities are made aware of the potentially deadly impacts of OPG's plan.