

WINNING COMMUNITY SUPPORT THROUGH PROACTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

For over 20 years the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Office (LLRWMO) has conducted remedial projects in communities across Canada. Through experience in the various social climates of Canadian communities, the LLRWMO has learned that community involvement and communications are integral to a project's overall success. The Port Hope Area Initiative is the largest project ever undertaken by the LLRWMO and all the proactive communications and consultation lessons learned from other projects have been applied in the Port Hope and Port Granby communities. The relationship of trust and credibility built over 20 years of LLRWMO operations in Port Hope provides a firm foundation for moving forward with the cleanup and long-term safe management of approximately two million cubic metres of low-level radioactive waste and contaminated soil in the Port Hope and Port Granby communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Office (LLRWMO) was established in 1982, to carry out federal government responsibilities for historic low-level radioactive wastes across Canada. Funded through Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) and administered by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL), the LLRWMO has conducted projects in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Alberta and Ontario.

Most (95%) of the historic low-level radioactive wastes for which the LLRWMO has responsibility are located in and around Port Hope, Ontario, the site of the refining operations of the former federal

Crown Corporation, Eldorado Nuclear (Eldorado). Most of the historic wastes dealt with by the LLRWMO are either associated with the transportation of ore from Port Radium on Great Bear Lake to Port Hope or with the refining and conversion of radium and uranium by Eldorado in Port Hope.

From the 1930s to 1988, Eldorado refined and converted radium and uranium in Port Hope for Canadian industrial and medical uses. The radium cycle was dismantled in the 1950s, and the facility began to produce uranium fuel for Canada's fledgling nuclear power industry. In 1988 the federal government sold Eldorado Nuclear Limited to Cameco Corporation, which now operates the Port Hope uranium conversion facilities. All low-level radioactive wastes generated from Eldorado operations were accepted as a federal government responsibility.

As you can imagine, the scientists and workers at the Eldorado mining and refining operations in the 30s, 40s, 50s and even 60s, were nowhere near as careful as today's industry is when handling radioactive material. Early dumping practices and the inadvertent use of contaminated fill created pockets of contaminated material throughout urban Port Hope.

Because the Crown Corporation no longer exists, the federal government has also assumed responsibility for decommissioning two large volume low-level radioactive waste management facilities just outside the urban boundary of Port Hope - the Welcome Waste Management Facility and the Port Granby Waste Management Facility. While these facilities are currently well managed, the present situation is not appropriate for the long-term future.

II. THE PROBLEM

The presence of the wastes in the Port Hope area has created a buzz for the Port Hope area around the country – and not exactly a favourable one. International headlines were achieved in the early 1970s when the problem of radioactive material distributed throughout the community was discovered. This stigma has not completely disappeared. But cleanup efforts over the years, a concerted municipal effort to market the community's heritage and now the federal government's positive initiative on the long-term management of the two million cubic metres of waste located in the area, has begun to shift the outside world's opinion of Port Hope.

Improving the reputation of Port Hope was one of the driving motivations behind the federal/municipal Legal Agreement signed in 2001. Our projects are governed by that Legal Agreement, which includes directives on communications, interaction with the public and with the municipal councils. Understandably, the municipalities wanted full promotion of the cleanup projects within the communities and as little publicity as possible outside the communities.

The Port Hope area communities may be challenged by living with radioactive waste, but they are not alone. The LLRWMO has worked in other communities such as Surrey, B.C. and Scarborough, Ontario where the communities had very definite ideas about how the waste should be managed. In those communities the LLRWMO worked in an open and cooperative fashion with the local residents – opening storefront offices in malls and gathering advice and input from community committees and groups. This paper focuses on the community relations program for the Port Hope Area Initiative and communications tools, engagement techniques and strategies for community acceptance that are an integral part of every LLRWMO project anywhere in Canada.

III. A LASTING RELATIONSHIP TO BUILD ON

The LLRWMO and the Port Hope community have a long-term working relationship. The LLRWMO was founded in 1982, following a major cleanup in Port Hope, directed by a federal-

provincial task force. That cleanup lasted from 1976 to 1981 and saw over 4,000 properties surveyed, over 400 remedial action locations and 100,000 m³ of contaminated soil and waste carried off to AECL's Chalk River facility. The waste that could not be accommodated at Chalk River was consolidated in a number of major sites in Port Hope. The federal government then acknowledged that there was an ongoing need for an organization to manage the remaining waste in Port Hope while a disposal site was sought elsewhere. Hence, the LLRWMO was formed.

Unique partnerships have been developed by the LLRWMO in Port Hope. The long history of the LLRWMO in Port Hope and our interim waste management programs have established a relationship of trust and credibility with Port Hope residents, businesses and particularly the real estate industry. Port Hope is the only town in Canada where properties are surveyed inside and out for radiological contamination. In the 1980s, financial institutions began asking for letters confirming the radiological status of a property before granting a mortgage. Through years of liaison with local real estate agents, this became normal practice for most transactions. Now any new property purchaser is made aware of the radioactive waste problem and the initiative to clean it up before they decide to move in. These letters raise public awareness of the cleanup and give the individual property owners peace of mind about the safety of their new home.

IV. THE LONG SEARCH

During the 1970s and 1980s, finding a site for long-term waste management was the responsibility of the Crown Corporation, Eldorado Nuclear, which was also responsible for the waste in the two major storage areas at Welcome in Hope Township, and Port Granby in the Municipality of Clarington. Eldorado tried, and tried very hard, to find a new site to dispose of the low-level radioactive waste and/or to relocate its existing refining/conversion facilities away from the harbour in the heart of Port Hope.

In 1986, after several unsuccessful high-profile projects, the federal government stepped in, ordered Eldorado to stop work and appointed a task force called "Opting for Cooperation" to lay out a cooperative method for siting a low-level radioactive waste management facility. This two-year "process task force" recommended another task force process that involved an Ontario-wide search for a willing host community. Also in 1988, the federal government sold Eldorado Nuclear and all its assets to Cameco Corporation. From this point on, responsibility for locating a long-term management facility and cleaning up sites contaminated by the Eldorado waste fell onto the shoulders of the Government of Canada.

The Low-Level Radioactive Waste Siting Task Force operated from 1988 to 1995, working cooperatively with municipal governments and community liaison groups in the three "source" jurisdictions: the Town of Port Hope; the Township of Hope and the Municipality of Clarington. These community liaison groups empowered local citizens and gave them ownership over the issue. Many of these people are still involved in the LLRW issue today.

The Siting Task Force canvassed almost 500 municipalities across Ontario regarding their interest in becoming a host community for the wastes. About a dozen expressed some interest. This was narrowed down to five and finally to one – Deep River. Deep River is the community on the Ottawa River that currently hosts AECL's Chalk River facilities. In 1995 the Siting Task Force reported to the federal government that it had succeeded in finding a willing host community for all the remaining Port Hope area radioactive wastes.

The three communities in the Port Hope Area were very, very pleased. But that euphoria didn't last very long because the federal government and the Municipality of Deep River could not reach

agreement on the compensation the community would receive. So in 1996, once again, there was no place to dispose of the 1.5 million m³ of historic low-level radioactive waste located in the Port Hope area.

V. A SOLUTION IN SIGHT

During the Siting Task Force days, the source communities of Port Hope, Hope Township and Clarington began to get together on a regular basis to plan for remediation of waste sites and to encourage the search for a new site to which the waste could be relocated. All this effort and cooperation stood the federal government in very good stead as the communities began to realize that no other community would step forward as a willing host community. Local leadership was provided in 1997 when Hope Township Council said they would work with the federal government to plan a new long-term management facility within the township boundaries. Port Hope followed suit in 1998. Clarington struck a community committee in 1998 and came up with a recommended waste management concept for Port Granby wastes.

And so, after about 30 years of frustration, the cleanup and long-term management of these wastes was on the horizon. *Principles of Understanding* and then a *Legal Agreement* were signed between the Government of Canada, the Township of Hope, the Town of Port Hope and the Municipality of Clarington. Shortly after each municipality signed the *Legal Agreement* in 2000, the Town of Port Hope and the Township of Hope were amalgamated into one municipality. The unique agreement includes host community fees of \$10 million to each of the three signatory communities, policies on cleanup, property value protection, environmental assessment and licensing requirements.

The Port Hope Area Initiative was launched by Natural Resources Canada and the Municipalities of Port Hope and Clarington in the summer of 2001 with the LLRWMO as the proponent. The \$260 million Initiative includes the host community fees, the Environmental Assessment and design and licensing phase, the construction phase and the long-term management phase of the Port Hope and Port Granby Projects.

VI. BUILDING COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE AND SUPPORT

The Port Hope Area Initiative team is a community-based project working to improve the environment for future generations. Communicating about the initiative is challenging at times – but the projects are a positive improvement and the support of the community makes everything possible. As the Mayor of Port Hope said in a recent speech,

“The sentiment I hear from talking with community members is ‘Let’s get on with the cleanup, but let’s do it right!’”

That commitment to “doing it right for generations to come” allows the Port Hope Area Initiative staff the time to conduct comprehensive baseline environmental studies, to design and develop potential alternative ways of conducting the projects and to assess the effects of the preferred alternative on the environment. When we’re asked, “What is taking you so long? Let’s get on with it!” we reply, “This Project will last for hundreds of years. A few years of careful planning and investigation will ensure that we are leaving an honourable legacy for future generations.”

Communications and consultation during the Environmental Assessment Phase has built on community support with its inclusiveness and transparency. All the Environmental Assessment

activities have been conducted in an open, transparent and traceable manner. In other words, everything we do is done in public and with public involvement.

Using the Port Hope Area Initiative as the model, we'd like to share with you the strategies, techniques and tools the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Office has developed and continues to employ with the objective of building community acceptance at the local level.

VII. PLANNING COMMUNICATIONS FOR A COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVE

The remainder of this paper follows a communications planning pattern:

1. Develop a community profile through research
2. Develop communications strategies and plans to build and maintain trust and credibility
3. Build community partnerships
4. Identify issues and develop issue management techniques
5. Plan for interaction with stakeholders (put a face on the project)
6. Maintain proactive two-way communications
7. Report and feed-back to all stakeholders
8. Manage the program using periodic evaluation techniques
9. Plan to maintain a community relationship for the long-term

1. Community Profile

All communications work begins with research, research and more research. Research can take many forms such as; statistical data gathering, interviews with officials, businesses and residents, focus groups and public attitude surveys. It can also be augmented – never replaced – with first-hand knowledge and experience in the community milieu. The community profile developed from this research forms the foundation of the entire communications strategy – it outlines issues and approaches to those issues which are suitable to that community. The community relations program, a consultation plan and a media-relations strategy are all based on this community profile.

Professional consultants developed community profiles for the Port Hope Area Initiative based on community knowledge, experience and consultation. In fact, even before the Initiative was launched, consultants were working with community committees to develop an approach to communications that would fit the projects and the communities. Attitudes and issues in the communities were identified and approaches to communications were agreed upon with municipal and federal officials. When everyone knows where this is going and why, accomplishing the trip is much more likely to get there without too much arguing over the twists and turns in the route.

2. Develop Communications Strategies and Plans to Build and Maintain Trust and Credibility

With all this preliminary groundwork and a good community profile in hand, we set about developing a communications strategy that would capitalize on opportunities to build and maintain trust in the Environmental Assessment process. We wanted to set the benchmark for community relations by exceeding community and government expectations and requirements, promoting community ownership and, most of all, by maintaining and building support for and confidence in the Initiative.

In the Port Hope area, we set out to establish brand recognition by positioning the LLRWMO as the competent organization to clean up and manage the historic waste, to work effectively with all stakeholders and to be a trustworthy and credible source of information and technical expertise.

All our partners agreed that the conditions for success of the Projects were:

- An open and transparent Environmental Assessment process;
- Independent technical review;
- Participation open to all;
- Strong technical and policy support;
- Demonstrable progress; and
- Municipal ownership.

From these conditions we developed the fundamental key messages to guide us through the environmental assessment process. These key messages continue to apply and have been augmented as we proceed.

Our consultation and communications plans grew out of the strategic planning for communications in the early stages of the projects. The Communications Plans identify the target audiences, optimal methods to reach them and sequence those activities and products. The local public is a key audience and techniques were developed to meet the needs of the general public as well as more informed stakeholders and environmental groups. As a federal government agency, we always have to consider the general public across Canada (in both official languages) so special communications vehicles such as the web site were designed to reach a broader audience. Techniques to consult federal, provincial and municipal government officials and elected representatives were detailed in an addendum to the overall communications plan. A separate consultation and communications plan was developed to reach First Nations in southeastern Ontario.

The best communications strategies and plans define everyone's role in the process and are flexible enough to accommodate unplanned events and fresh community input. That brings us to the next aspect of the communications process – defining roles and building community partnerships.

3. Build Community Partnerships

With the long history of low-level radioactive waste in our community, we have an educated public, but also an opinionated and driven group of individuals. Many of these individuals have been deeply involved in the struggle to deal with the radioactive waste problem in their community. Commitment, involvement and leadership, such that community residents have shown over the long years of dealing with this issue engenders “ownership” for the solution. Managing expectations becomes more difficult when all players want a major role in the solution.

This “ownership” is positive when the Project's allies are a firm group of elected officials on Municipal Council who want the job done and done right. The role of the Municipal Council is clearly defined in the *Legal Agreement* and both Port Hope and Clarington are eager to fulfill their roles. Partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, health units and the school board also contribute greatly to the momentum we must maintain during a long environmental assessment process.

When the Port Hope Area Initiative was established, a special program called the Property Value Protection Program was put in place. Basically it protects property owners who realize a loss of property value as a result of the Port Hope Area Initiative. The program runs from 2000 until two years after the Initiative is completed and it compensates for financial losses realized from the sale of a property, loss of rental income or mortgage renewal difficulties as a result of activities relating to the

Initiative. This program maintains stability in the real estate market and enhances the trust and credibility of the Port Hope Area Initiative.

Other long-standing programs, such as monitoring construction projects and removing any contaminated soil, and our environmental monitoring programs have established a strong working relationship between local residents and the staff of the LLRWMO.

But past roles and “ownership” can create difficulties when a group of citizens is committed to a specific course of action – especially one that the Environmental Assessment studies don’t bear out as the best solution. Currently, we have this problem in the area of our Port Granby Project. In 1998 a small group of people was brought together by their Municipal Council to recommend the best way of long-term management for the wastes currently stored on the site on shoreline of Lake Ontario. This group would not even entertain any option of moving the wastes away from the eroding bluffs on the shoreline – they opted for in-place management of the wastes. These people feel betrayed and ignored because the Environmental Assessment process has recommended excavating the waste and encapsulating it in an aboveground mound on a site about 800 metres to the north. The original group has convinced many of their neighbours that the wastes cannot be moved safely and that the LLRWMO was not listening to them.

Throughout the process, we’ve involved them in workshops and forums, answered their questions, acted on their suggestions, held six special meetings with them, surveyed them for their opinions, met with them in their homes, taken them on tours and provided them with tons of information. We’ll continue to work with them, but we cannot satisfy them. We do have the strong support of the municipal council and we’re confident that the environmental assessment will satisfy all the federal agencies that our recommendation is the best one for the long-term safety of the environment and the public.

4. Identify Issues and Develop Issue Management Techniques

The real centre of our issue management techniques is the public and what they say to us. Every comment, issue raised or question asked about the Port Granby or Port Hope Projects in person, by phone, email or writing, has been recorded. Since the start of the Port Hope Area Initiative, comments from hundreds of individuals and groups have been gathered. In the recently completed environmental assessment study reports every pertinent issue recorded has been considered.

Major issues were identified in our early communications strategy and key messages were developed to respond to those issues. Questions and answers for all staff and key stakeholders are developed on a routine basis and particularly prior to any consultation event.

At the heart of managing all this input are two computerized databases for each project. The first, a stakeholder database, records every comment and the name of the person who makes it. The second, an issues database, highlights the key issues from the comments, organizes them and tracks how the project team addresses them.

Emerging issues are identified by on-going research including:

- three waves of public attitude surveys (2002, 2003 and 2004);
- stakeholder interviews and focus groups;
- media monitoring; and
- comment tracking.

Public attitude surveys are excellent ways of identifying shifts in public opinion and emerging issues and they also help us evaluate the effectiveness of our communications. We hold key

stakeholder interviews and focus groups to explore issues at much more depth and to assist in determining the best way to communicate to both the general public and our target audiences.

Media monitoring is the most common way of tracking issues, but frankly, once an issue reaches the media it is much more difficult to manage. We can't stop articles and letters appearing regarding sensitive issues, but by developing a good relationship with the local media we can identify the issues early and devise a strategy to handle them locally. A different strategy may apply nationally, depending on the issue.

An understanding of the local media and its needs is the basis for a successful community media-relations plan. A national media outlet doesn't really want to see you unless there's a news story and a significant one. Locally, it's a different story. Editors and reporters will spend time getting to know you and your project. At the same time you can get to know them, their deadlines, their "silly season", their "news hole" and how it expands some days compared to others. All this helps in times of crisis as well as during the execution of the on-going media relations plan.

At team meetings, high priority issues are discussed and strategies for dealing with them are devised. Then we discuss the approach to any emerging issue at regular meetings with municipal officials, Natural Resources Canada and AECL. In that way, we gain concurrence on the handling of any issue before it blows up in the media.

We have an issue management communications network set up with communicators in government agencies that might be affected by issues related to the Port Hope Area Initiative. Last year this network served us well during management of an issue about radon in a local school. We were able to call on the School Board and the Medical Officer of Health to assist in communicating with parents and the public.

5. Plan for Interaction With Stakeholders (put a face on the project)

When the Port Hope Area Initiative began in 2001, many local people knew about the LLRWMO and the waste in Port Hope, but they didn't talk about it. The subject was avoided almost with a sense of shame. The partners all agreed that if the Initiative was going to succeed we had to increase awareness and acceptance of the aim to give our children a better future environment.

This was accomplished with a decidedly local touch. A main street Project Information Exchange and downtown offices were opened to accommodate the engineers, environmental specialists, property value protection and communications specialists needed for two major projects. Local people with both the professional qualifications and the commitment were hired. These locals brought with them the credibility of years of personal community involvement such as volunteering with the fire department, cultural organizations, sports groups, and sororities.

A project identity was developed to establish our environmentally friendly brand image. The rising sun, oak leaf, land and water emblem is now emblazoned on our offices, newsletters, advertising and fact sheets. The media relations program commenced. The first fact sheets and newsletters were broadly distributed and mailing lists were initiated.



6. Maintain Proactive Two-Way Communications

The storefront “Project Information Exchange” is our day-to-day community face. Open five days a week, it operates as a drop-in centre and library. People new to the community come in to ask about their property, the projects or just to gain some background knowledge about the community. Copies of final draft EA and technical studies and all documents on the federal Canadian Environmental Assessment Act “public registry” are available for public review. Staff at the Project Information Exchange make sure that communications are two-way, collecting and recording all the comments and questions people raise and ensuring that those questions are answered and comments are considered in the Environmental Assessments. A similar Project Information Exchange for the Port Granby Project was opened in Clarington for a three-month period, but the rural nature of the community didn’t lend itself to a main street drop-in centre.

Many people in the community knew nothing of the objective to clean up the remaining low-level radioactive waste when the Initiative was launched in 2001. There was an information gap that needed to be filled on a regular basis. The first newsletter, outlining the reasons for this community-based project went to all local residents in the Fall of 2001. The quarterly *Port Hope Area Initiative News* is now distributed to over 14,000 residents and interested parties. It contains the latest project information, written in a style that is very readable. This is our flagship publication and so it is carefully designed to catch the eye and simplify complex subjects.

A difficult audience to reach, is people considering moving into the area, so we have produced attractive brochures called *Have You Ever Heard of the Port Hope Area Initiative?* to introduce new people to our projects in a non-threatening manner. Because we have developed a strong working relationship with local real estate agents, they distribute these handouts to potential new residents. The real estate community also helps distribute fact sheets on the Property Value Protection Program and other information about the projects. Since 2002, almost every agreement of purchase and sale in Port Hope includes a clause stating that the purchaser is aware of the Port Hope Area Initiative. And to cover the few omissions, Port Hope has recently passed a resolution stating that every new home purchaser must be made aware of the Initiative and the Property Value Protection Program.

Our consultation events are open to all, so prior to every workshop or open house we advertise, send out news releases and invitations to everyone on our mailing list. Each open house and workshop is a two-way communication event. We get residents involved in generating ideas for the projects, giving their opinions on various options or simply commenting on our studies. Some of our most successful consultation events are when specialist consultants interact directly with the public, collecting valuable local environmental knowledge and community values.

Regular municipal council briefings are not our only way of informing the public about our progress. We’ve done the “rubber chicken” rounds several times by talking to all the service clubs and community groups that will have us. We’ve gone to school parent councils and Church groups to brief them on the projects and gather their comments. Small “kitchen table” meetings have been held in people’s homes, as well as one-on-one special meetings with the potentially most affected residents.

Booths at community fairs and events are another way we try to reach out to people and engage them in our Projects. We reach different audiences at these community events than we do at consultation events specifically for the Initiative.

In 2002 and 2003 we held our own community fairs/trade shows called Expos. These two-day events involved all community groups with a stake in the Initiative as well as federal and municipal government stakeholders. The LLRWMO and its consultants discussed current information gathered

for studies and record all comments. The Municipalities and federal authorities explained their roles in the Initiative and local interest groups presented their positions to the public. By inviting these groups to participate – at no cost to them – we encourage full community dialogue on our projects. One of the greatest advantages of Expo is the networking opportunities for all the groups involved in the Initiative – partners, regulators, proponent and opponents.

Local media “advertorials” called *Moving Ahead* are designed to focus the public attention on the progress the project is making and on a better future. We have other “awareness” type ads in local publications. Posters and signs “Creating a Better Environment” are displayed on site and in prominent public locations such as the sports complex, public libraries and municipal offices.

Public tours of the existing waste management facilities and the major sites to be cleaned up have proven to be very effective tools to bring support to the Initiative. When people see the quantities of waste and contaminated soil we have to deal with and the uncontrolled locations of those materials, the cleanup becomes real and much more necessary. One of our sites – Port Granby Waste Management Facility – looks just perfect from the road because it is well managed. But when you walk on site and see the eroding bluffs and the proximity of the waste to the shoreline of Lake Ontario, one suddenly recognizes the need for the project.

Our media relations program is very proactive. We have an excellent relationship with the local media. We give new reporters an orientation briefing and take them on site tours. Briefings are set up surrounding significant milestones in the projects and enquires are answered on a daily basis.

Another very active stakeholder consultation program follows our aboriginal communications plan. Local First Nation communities are regularly consulted regarding the projects and particularly the aboriginal interests portion of the socio-economic environmental assessment.

Our government relations program entails briefings for federal and provincial Members of Parliament in two different ridings, routine contacts with their constituency workers and tours of the affected sites. As part of our issues management program we make sure that the lines of communication are always open between the elected officials and our management team.

Municipal government relations have an extremely high priority in the Port Hope Area Initiative. Every six weeks we meet with the Municipalities to monitor the progress of the Projects, plan for peer review and municipal concurrence on studies. We also jointly design communications plans to deal with emerging issues. To implement these communications plans and manage the peer review process our team has daily contact with municipal staff dedicated to our projects. Costs for municipal involvement and peer review are all part of the Initiative budget as negotiated and enshrined in the *Legal Agreement*.

We have 50 to 60 visitors a day to our website, www.llrwmo.org, seeking information on low-level radioactive waste. There is a whole section of the site devoted to the Port Hope Area Initiative and about half the public e-mail enquiries generated by the web site are from Port Hope or Clarington residents.

All these aggressive communications avenues started with the launch of the Initiative and will be maintained in some form or another throughout the Projects’ lifespan.

7. Report and Feedback to All Stakeholders

To review, our formal reporting and feedback mechanisms include:

- Federal government stakeholders receive quarterly reports and briefings. Our primary department, Natural Resources Canada, receives monthly reports, meets with us regularly and approves all major communications products.

- The Municipalities of Port Hope and Clarington meet with us regularly. Councils are briefed quarterly in public and there is daily feedback to them on our communications activities, issue management strategies and progress of technical and EA studies.
- Public stakeholders receive responses to questions and comments. A summary of issues and responses is incorporated into the environmental assessment reports. Consultation reports on each event are on file at the Project Information Exchange and the public libraries.
- Groups are invited to participate in Expos and special meetings to express their concerns and receive feed-back on the results of their past involvement.

8. Manage the Program Using Periodic Evaluation Techniques

The feedback mechanisms mentioned above supply regular evaluation information and this feedback is used to manage and modify our communications plans when needed.

All communicators are aware that measuring results of a community relations program is challenging. Built into our communications plans are a variety of techniques such as analyzing comment and evaluation sheets from workshops, issue management, media monitoring, focus groups and annual public attitude surveys. Formal and informal comments from our partners in government also form an important part of our evaluation. All these sources of qualitative data are used to review the progress of our strategic communications plan, to modify it where necessary, to create new key messages and issue responses – in general to manage the program.

VIII. SO HOW ARE WE DOING?

Three annual waves of public attitude research indicate that our communications strategies are working. In the first survey, awareness of the Port Hope Area Initiative Projects averaged 34% over the 600 respondents in Port Hope and Clarington. Awareness has steadily increased to 59% in Clarington and 69% in Port Hope. While confidence in the safety of LLRWMO management of waste is still very high, only about half the respondents say they anticipate their satisfaction with living in the community will increase with the completion of the facility. That is a drop from about 71% in 2003 and 64% in 2002. Still, what other project to build a radioactive waste management facility in a community can boast that half the residents are looking forward to having the facility constructed?

As the projects get closer to becoming a reality and more details are presented, people begin feeling less philosophical and more definite about how the projects will affect them. When we announced the proposed transportation routes for waste and construction materials we heard immediately from near-by residents. Reaching out and consulting the most affected stakeholders has comforted some and increased negative feelings in others.

But polls and surveys are not the only measures of our success. Favourable public comments, unanimous votes of confidence from both municipal councils and pats on the back from other stakeholders have also come our way. Here's one from a school parent council member:

“A dedicated group of people working to better our community.
Keep up the great work!”

In the media, success is measured with more subtlety. In general, we have received many neutral or somewhat positive articles and very few negative stories.

We have provided, to various national and regional media, facts and information on the positive goal of the Initiative. The biggest hurdle now facing our communication program is the potential overlap from another project in Port Hope, Cameco Corporation's SEU Blending facility proposal. A citizen's group called FARE (Families Against Radiation Exposure) has formed to fight this SEU project. We must keep the Initiative distinct and focused on the good news story that it is for the Port Hope area and indeed, all of Canada.

9. *Plan to Maintain the Community Relationship for the Long-Term*

This is no short-term effort. The Port Hope Area Initiative involves two long-term management projects and the relationship between the LLRWMO and the local communities will be equally as lasting.

Now that the environmental assessment study reports have been submitted, the facility designs are being refined. This period gives the LLRWMO time to work with the communities and the Municipalities to plan detailed mitigation measures and prepare for the disruption of a major cleanup project. There will also be community input to long-term monitoring plans, refined designs for the facilities, community uses for the closed facilities and even new names for the facilities.

Newsletters, communications offices and, of course, the Property Value Protection program will continue while the federal authorities are preparing the Screening Reports and considering their decisions on the Environmental Assessment. CNSC licensing will follow.

In 2007/2008 the five-year construction period is scheduled to begin. A resurvey of every potential location for low-level radioactive waste in Port Hope, including over 2,000 private properties, will be initiated. Both the resurvey and eventually the cleanup activities will stretch the community/LLRWMO relationship a little thinner. Neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood, we plan to listen, consult and report back to residents on the best way to cleanup their neighbourhood.

By about 2012, these projects will be wrapping up – but the long-term stewardship of the low-level radioactive wastes will go on for hundreds of years. The LLRWMO and the communities will continue to be part of the partnership to create a better environment for generations to come.