

## **Engaging community groups in discussions on science issues: The CoRWM Discussion Guide.**

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### **Introduction**

The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) is an independent committee appointed by the UK Government. Their task is to review the options for managing those UK radioactive wastes for which there is no agreed long-term solution. CoRWM was asked to consult with a wide range of individual and organisations and to make recommendations to the UK Government in 2006.

CoRWM was asked to work in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, to provide an opportunity for members of the UK public and other key stakeholder groups to participate. Their aim is to earn public trust by securing confidence in their actions. Openness requires that CoRWM operate in public and are accessible both in person and through their publications. Transparency means that they aim to make as clear as possible how, and why, they have formulated their recommendations.

Although CoRWM's programme of public and stakeholder engagement involved a variety of techniques including public open meetings, citizen and stakeholder panels, these small-group techniques could only involve a limited number of participants.

### **Aims**

CoRWM wanted to reach the wider public in a deliberative way, one which allowed participants to be exposed to others' viewpoints and to form their own opinions about the choices that had to be made and the options for managing the waste. CoRWM commissioned Dialogue by Design to design a paper-based Discussion Guide and accompanying website to enable groups of people from all over the UK to talk about their priorities and concerns about the way the UK manages its radioactive waste.

The aim was for groups of people to get together - whether in a school, village hall or the local pub - to discuss the subject. The guide was aimed at a wide audience - specialist knowledge on radioactive waste was not required.

### **Content**

A balance was needed between providing sufficient information to enable groups with little or no existing knowledge about radioactive waste to participate, and keeping the level and amount of information to a minimum so that the amount of reading and assimilation was low.

The guide consisted of instructions, information cards, and a reply form, including a series of questions, on which the group could record their responses. Groups could feedback their views to CoRWM either via the dedicated website or by returning the reply form.

The focus of the questions were the ethical, social and moral issues around managing radioactive waste. Some of the issues raised in the Guide include:

*Should radioactive waste be buried deep underground forever or should it be stored above ground so it is easily retrievable?*

*Should it be managed in one or two locations in the UK or at existing nuclear sites?*

*How will any solution affect the environment and future generations?*

## **Participation**

Community groups and schools across the UK were invited to participate, and nearly 900 organisations requested a copy of the guide. Discussions took place between October 2005 and January 2006 and 568 reply forms were received from groups across the UK such as environment groups, local councils, interfaith groups, Women's Institutes, lifelong learning groups and youth groups. At least 2826 individuals participated in a discussion using the guide.

## **Results**

The results were input into Dialogue by Design's data analysis software which enables us to analyse large amounts of qualitative data quickly and systematically.

Over 60% of participants were from schools or colleges and results from schools were analysed separately from those of other organisations, partly so that the opinions of younger people and adults could be compared and partly because of the potential difference in the level of understanding or prior knowledge of radioactive waste issues in these two groups. Interestingly the views of adults and young people were very similar.

The four most important criteria in deciding how to manage radioactive waste for both groups were Environment, Long-term public safety, Short-term public safety and Security. The least important criteria for both groups' were Cost, Local Amenity and Implementability. There was a trend for flexibility to be more important for adults than for young people.

Generally both groups felt that we have a responsibility to begin to manage the waste now using the best of our knowledge, but at the same time many felt strongly that the option we choose should be flexible enough to allow future generations to manage the waste differently should something go wrong or a better method be developed. Young people were slightly more likely than adults to suggest leaving the problem entirely to future generations – which may be because that they have a greater confidence in the ability of future generations to discover new technological solutions.

Young people were fairly evenly split between preferring one or two sites for long-term waste management or a number of sites. Adults were more likely to prefer one or two sites, often because of concern about the safety or environment impact of transporting waste across the UK.

Both groups in general preferred the waste management facilities to be located at or near to existing sites, whilst acknowledging that some of these may not be suitable because of their geological character or proximity to centres of population. There was a general feeling that existing sites would be safer, and that local communities with experience of nuclear facilities would be more likely to accept additional waste management.

The factors that would make a local waste management facility more acceptable were similar for adults and young people. Assurance that the facility posed little or no risk to health and safety of the local population, openness and consultation, and compensation were common answers. Individuals would want to be compensated for reduced house prices, but investment in the wider community to compensate for the negative impact of the facility on the local economy, society, and amenity would also be important.

Adults were slightly more likely than young people to say that a facility would not be acceptable under any circumstances. Some groups felt that sites should be away from people, or people should be enabled to relocate. Young people were more likely to focus on the impact of a facility on local amenity – the amount of noise, visual impact etc. than adults, although many adult groups specified the type of facility that would or would not be acceptable and some preferred an underground facility.

Factors that would make a facility unacceptable to both young people and adults were essentially the reverse of the above, lack of consultation/public acceptability, risk to health and safety and negative impacts on local communities.

In terms of the options presented in the discussion guide, Option 3 – phased deep geological disposal - was the most preferred option by both adults and young people. It was seen as providing the best of both worlds, the safety of geological / underground protection with the flexibility for waste to be retrieved if future generations develop a superior management method. The second most popular choice for adults was Option 1 – long-term interim storage, probably due to its flexibility, whereas young people were more likely to go for Option 2 – deep geological disposal.

Participants were given the opportunity to make general comments or to give messages to CoRWM.

Both adults and young people talked about the possibility of generating more radioactive waste, through new nuclear power stations. Adult groups were more likely to be against new build, whereas young people were slightly more in favour of nuclear power. Both groups stressed the need for more investment in, or development of, renewable forms of energy generation, and research into alternatives.

Responses from older people followed very similar patterns to the responses from adult groups as a whole. The Older people who participated were perhaps more aware of the issues than some groups as they were University of the Third Age (lifelong learning) groups, and many of them will have studied the information in the discussion guide and accompanying leaflet about radioactive waste prior to their discussions. Older people were perhaps slightly more concerned about security and public safety (in the long and the short term) than adults as a whole, who chose environment as the most important criteria for deciding how to manage the wastes. In their answers to other questions older people's responses showed the same spread of opinions as adult groups as a whole.

Environment and anti-nuclear campaign groups prioritised the same criteria as adults as a whole (Environment, Security, Public Safety) and their opinions about future generations and locations of facilities were also broadly similar. Environment and anti nuclear groups were more likely to express views against new nuclear power stations and the production of further radioactive waste, although they were by no means the only groups expressing such views. They

also tended to be less in favour of the geological disposal options than adult groups as a whole. Some of the environment and anti-nuclear groups felt that deep geological disposal would lead to an 'out-of-sight, out-of-mind' approach. They tended to prefer long term interim storage, as it was perceived to allow facilities to be sited at or near to existing nuclear sites, and to minimise the need for transporting wastes across the U.K.

Overall, comments about the discussion guide itself were generally positive. Some groups felt there was too much information in the discussion guide, others that there was not enough. The criteria were perceived by some as inter-related, and therefore difficult to prioritise. Those who commented on the 3 options presented generally observed that they were rather limited.

The opportunity to input into decision making was welcomed, though some groups were sceptical about the public's ability to influence the government decision. There was a general feeling that the discussion guide consultation could have been more widely publicised and used, and awareness of CoRWM's other public engagement activities was low. Some groups were concerned that experts were not being consulted and a number of groups expressed a desire to be involved in more in depth discussions.

In February 2006, the results were displayed on a website (<http://corwm.dialoguebydesign.net>) for anyone to access, enabling an open and transparent process in which participants can explore the comments of other groups and see how their views fitted into the whole. CoRWM used the results to inform their recommendations to the UK Government, which were made in July 2006.