



Canadian Nuclear Laboratories | Laboratoires Nucléaires Canadiens



**PORT HOPE AREA  
INITIATIVE**

# **Port Hope Project Public Attitude Survey Research Report - Summary**

**June 2024**

Prepared by:



## **Land Acknowledgement**

CNL's Historic Waste Program Management Office and the Port Hope Area Initiative projects are situated on the traditional and treaty lands of the Williams Treaties First Nations, specifically the Gunshot Treaty signed with the Mississauga First Nations of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha and Scugog Island.

These Mississauga Nations are also signatories to various 18th and 19th century treaties that covered lands in different parts of south-central Ontario. In 1923, the Mississauga First Nations and the Chippewa First Nations consisting of Rama, Beausoleil and Georgina Island signed the Williams Treaties and together, over 90 years later in June 2018, joined to ensure that their rights to, and the relationship with, these lands are respected through a renewed agreement with Canada and the Province of Ontario.

The area in which we are situated is also home to Indigenous Peoples from across the region and Canada. CNL is grateful to have the opportunity to work on these traditionally and culturally significant lands and waterways.

## Summary

### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

As part of the Port Hope Project, periodic public attitude research is commissioned to monitor area residents' level of knowledge and awareness about historic, low-level radioactive waste and the Port Hope Area Initiative (PHAI) projects, identify issues and concerns, determine the communication needs of the public, and provide data regarding public attitudes and preferences.

The most recent iteration of the Port Hope Project Public Attitude Survey was conducted by CCI Research Inc. in the spring of 2024 on behalf of Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL). A survey was administered via telephone and online to Urban Ward and Rural Ward residents of Port Hope who were 18 years of age or older.

The 2024 survey contained 35 questions, including seven open-ended questions, and took an average of approximately 23 minutes to complete by phone. An overall total of 414 Port Hope surveys were completed. Specifically, 245 telephone interviews were completed by landline telephone and 146 were completed by cell phone during the period of February 20<sup>th</sup> to April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The survey introduction offered the option of completing the questionnaire online if the potential respondent did not wish to complete the survey by phone, and an additional six surveys were completed online based on the telephone invitation. Further, the CNL office in Port Hope shared a link to the online survey via social media channels and an additional 17 surveys were completed in this manner to make an overall total of 414 survey completions. The confidence interval for the overall Port Hope sample is approximately +/-4.7%, 19 times out of 20 (at the 95% confidence level, assuming a random and representative sample).

This report presents the findings for the 2024 Port Hope Project Public Attitude Survey. In an effort to achieve a sample that was reasonably representative of the population, age and gender targets were monitored within each ward during fielding, and the final data was weighted to reflect the relative age distribution in Port Hope according to the 2021 census. Comparisons between survey results for Urban and Rural Ward residents and between results for the current year (2024) and the surveys conducted in 2009 - 2018 are discussed throughout this report.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Satisfaction with Living in the Community

Overall satisfaction with living in the community remains high, with 98% of respondents indicating they are “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”. Satisfaction levels were similar to 2016 and 2018. In addition, overall satisfaction was high in both Wards and similar to the levels of satisfaction reported by respondents in the previous survey period in 2018.

#### Important Community Issues

The current findings show that “costs high (cost of living); housing, etc. (need for housing / housing issues)” appeared as the top issue in the community in 2024, with almost one-third (30%) of respondents identifying this topic in an open-ended format as one of the most important issues facing their community, which represents an increase over the previous survey period. In addition, “municipal services, town maintenance, infrastructure” was

identified by about one-fifth (22%) of respondents in their comments, which also represents an increase in the proportion of respondents referring to this as an important community issue. In contrast, the proportion of community residents identifying “relocation / clean up / transfer of low-level radioactive waste to the PHAI facility” as a top issue decreased compared to 2018.

The top most important issue that was identified specifically by residents of the Urban Ward was “costs high (cost of living); housing, etc. (need for housing / housing issues)”, mentioned by 34% of respondents. Rural Ward respondents identified matters related to “taxes, property taxes, use of tax money” and “municipal services, town maintenance, infrastructure” as the top issues, with 27% of these residents giving these as responses. These top issues were mentioned more often by respondents in 2024 than in 2018.

Topics that were mentioned in response to the open-ended question about the most important issue facing the community were top-of-mind for respondents. However, the cleanup of the low-level radioactive waste appears to be even more important when survey respondents are asked about it more directly, as 81% of respondents overall indicated that the cleanup of low-level radioactive waste was “very important” or “somewhat important” relative to the issues that they mentioned previously. While this is a large proportion of respondents, this rating is a decrease relative to the 2018 survey (86%).

### **Awareness and Knowledge about Low-Level Radioactive Waste in Area**

Most respondents indicated that they rarely think about living in a community with a low-level radioactive waste management facility; specifically, about two-thirds of respondents (66%) think about it “not very often” or “never”. However, while still low, survey respondents in 2024 indicated the highest levels of thinking about living in a community with a low-level radioactive waste management facility “very often” or “often” relative to all previously surveyed years (34% vs 21% - 26%).

Self-assessed knowledge about the presence of historic low-level radioactive waste in the community is similar to that of 2018, with 79% of respondents indicating that they are “very knowledgeable” or “somewhat knowledgeable” about this topic. In addition, respondents from the Urban Ward and the Rural Ward were similarly likely to report that they are “very knowledgeable” or “somewhat knowledgeable” about the presence of historic low-level radioactive waste in the community.

### **Familiarity with the Port Hope Project**

Roughly nine out of ten Port Hope residents reported awareness of the Port Hope Area Initiative (89%), which is a slight decrease from 2018. Additionally, 83% reported awareness of the long-term waste management facility which is consistent with the past two survey periods. The 2024 survey introduced two new aspects of the Port Hope Project: the PHAI Cleanup Criteria, and the Construction Monitoring Program. In response to these programs, only 61% of respondents reported knowledge of the PHAI Cleanup Criteria, and less than half (47%) reported knowledge of the Construction Monitoring Program.

Urban and Rural Ward respondents reported similar levels of overall familiarity with the PHAI. However, those who reside in the Rural Ward reported a higher level of awareness of the Construction Monitoring Program compared to those in the Urban Ward.

Approximately nine out of ten respondents reported awareness of the plans to clean up some residences and other sites contaminated with the historic low-level radioactive waste (89%), however this is a decrease in awareness from 2018 (94%). Reported awareness of radiological testing of urban and rural private properties in Port Hope also decreased from 2018, with 81% in 2024 relative to 88%, though the 2024 rate of awareness is similar to what was reported between 2012-2016. A relatively smaller proportion of residents reported awareness of the requirement that all trucks transporting waste on public roads must be clearly identified with the PHAI logo and contact information (68%), though this is similar to what was reported in 2018. The 2024 survey also asked respondents to rate their awareness on the Canadian Nuclear Laboratories' application to change the PHAI Cleanup Criteria for arsenic, and the Canadian Nuclear Laboratories' current efforts to reduce the length of time for cleanup on a property, though relatively lower proportions of respondents reported awareness to either of these plans (44% and 39%, respectively).

In addition, Urban Ward residents indicated a greater awareness of the radiological testing of urban and rural private properties in Port Hope than respondents who were living in the Rural Ward, while Rural Ward residents indicated a greater awareness of the requirement that all trucks transporting waste on public roads must be clearly identified with the PHAI logo and contact information.

Survey respondents were also asked to report their knowledge about the PHAI construction and cleanup activities that are currently underway in the community of Port Hope. Relative to 2018, general knowledge of these activities decreased somewhat in 2024 (69% vs. 76%), particularly for those living in the Urban Ward.

### **Confidence and Concerns Regarding the Port Hope Project**

About four out of five of the survey respondents overall (83%) expressed confidence that the waste can be safely managed at the new long-term waste management facility, with 34% indicating they were "very confident" and 48% indicating they were "somewhat confident". This result is similar to the overall confidence observed in each survey period since 2009.

There were a wide range of diverse issues or concerns about the Port Hope Project identified by respondents, the most common of which were related to the "length of time it will take / taking too long" (31%), "find it / clean it all up; quality of clean-up" (18%), and "using tax payer's money / cost / wasting money" (16%). With the exception of "find it / clean it all up; quality of clean-up", which was similar to concerns mentioned in 2018, the frequency with which the other two concerns were mentioned increased significantly from 2018. In contrast, the frequency of mentioning "transporting / waste removal - spills, accidents, traffic" decreased from 2018 to 2024 (24% to 11%, respectively).

When asked to indicate whether they have been affected, or anyone in their household has been affected by the Port Hope Project, either positively or negatively, the majority of respondents (66%) indicated they have not been affected, though this had decreased from 2018. Close to one-fifth of respondents (22%) in 2024 indicated they had been negatively affected by the Port Hope Project, while only 12% reported being positively impacted. There were stark contrasts between the Urban and Rural wards, such that Rural Ward respondents were significantly more likely to indicate that they had not been impacted by the Port Hope Project (81% vs. 62%), and fewer indicating either a positive impact (6% vs. 14%), or negative impact (12% vs. 24%).

The 2024 survey introduced a follow-up question to determine the magnitude of the positive or negative impact reported previously. In terms of the magnitude of positive impact, about one-third of respondents reported a very large or large impact, moderate impact, and small or very small impact. Similar responses were seen for those who reported experiencing a negative impact. However, the strength of negative impact differed dramatically across Urban and Rural Wards, where 59% of Rural Ward respondents reported a small or very small impact, and only 10% reporting a large or very large impact.

Overall, about half of all respondents indicated that they were either very concerned or somewhat concerned that the project can minimize the effects of dust, traffic, and noise. The 2024 survey added a new open-end follow-up to identify themes that respondents were most concerned about. Overall, the most common themes indicated were “dust / dirt / contaminants in the air / air quality” (26%), “parking / traffic” (23%) and “construction / trucks / inconvenience / disruption” (20%).

When asked “how concerned are you about the project’s impact on the natural environment,” about seven out of ten respondents (69%) expressed concern (“very concerned” or “somewhat concerned”), while the remaining 31% reported that they were “not very concerned” or “not at all concerned”, and these results are identical to those of 2018. Respondents expressing concern were then asked to specify what they were concerned about in an open-ended format. The most common response in 2024 was related to the effects on “trees” (45%), followed by “water / run-off / groundwater / leaching into water” (20%) which dropped slightly, but significantly, relative to 2018 (28%). The next most common themes related to specific concerns were “the environment (general)” (19%), and “animals, wildlife” (16%) which were all indicated as environmental issues comparable to 2018.

When asked to identify the benefits of the Port Hope Project, the most common responses were related to the “cleanup and containment of the radioactive waste” (45%), though this was a decrease relative to 2018, and “improved community health and safety (cleaner)” (33%), which was an increase from all previously surveyed years. In total, 4% of respondents believed there to be “no benefit” to the project, which was similar to 2018.

### **Property Value Protection Program**

A total of 36% of respondents reported being “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with the Property Value Protection (PVP) Program, which is a decline from the 2018 result (46%), and lower than all years since 2010 (note that the number of response options and some of the option names changed in 2016, which may have contributed to this observed difference).

Similar to the findings in 2016 and 2018, 65% of respondents in 2024 indicated that they are “very confident” or “somewhat confident” that the PVP Program will compensate for decrease of property value.

### **The Special Circumstances Protocol**

In 2024, a new survey question was added to probe resident familiarity with the Port Hope Area Initiative’s Special Circumstances Protocol. The majority of respondents (82%) were “not very familiar” or “not at all familiar” with the protocol.

Participants were read (telephone) or were asked to read (online) a description of the Special Circumstances Protocol and then were asked to report whether they knew that they could leave waste behind on their property if they choose to do so, as well as whether they knew what the implications were for leaving waste on their property. Almost three-quarters of respondents reported having no knowledge of the choice to leave waste behind on their property (73%), nor having knowledge of the implications for leaving waste behind on their property (73%).

## **Communications**

When respondents were asked to choose their first and second most trusted sources for providing accurate and complete information about the PHAI, the largest proportion chose CNL Staff working on the PHAI (51%) as their first or second choice. Furthermore, just under half of respondents reported that they trusted the Municipality of Port Hope (42%) or independent qualified scientists (41%) to provide accurate and complete information. In addition, close to one out of five (18%) identified local media, and another 14% indicated local community groups as their trusted sources to provide accurate and complete information about the PHAI. There were no significant differences in preferred sources across Rural Ward or Urban Ward respondents.

With respect to communication about the PHAI, about three-quarters of respondents (74%) reported being satisfied overall with CNL's efforts to provide information about the Port Hope Area Initiative, which is a slight decrease in satisfaction from 82% in both 2016 and 2018. Furthermore, similar to results obtained regarding responsiveness in 2016 and 2018, approximately four out of five respondents (81%) indicated they were "very confident" or "confident" that CNL will respond to any concerns they may have.

The 2024 survey also introduced a question to probe whether participants know how to get information related to Port Hope, with about two-thirds of respondents (64%) indicating "yes".

In terms of preferred sourced of information, "Brochures or newsletters through the regular mail" was still overwhelmingly the top choice of respondents for receiving information about the Port Hope Project (64%), though this has decreased somewhat since 2018 (71%). The next most preferred method to receiving updates was "electronically by email or internet" (37%), which was an increase relative to 2018 (26%), followed by "the Port Hope Area Initiative website" (30%), which was also an increase relative to 2018 (21%). The option to receive updates through "public meetings or open houses involving CNL staff" dropped to 26% in 2024 relative to 33% in 2018, followed by "social media, such as Facebook or Twitter" (14%), and "articles or advertising by your local media", which also dramatically dropped from 28% in 2018, to 11% in 2024. "Visiting or calling the CNL offices" remained as the least preferred method of receiving updates (8%).

With respect to primary sources of local news, survey respondents most often relied on "social media such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram" (27%), though this option was newly added in 2024. The next most popular source of local news in 2024 was Northumberlandnews.com (18%).