

Nova Scotians Discuss Future Energy Alternatives

November 19, 2004 (Halifax, NS) -- Nova Scotians are gathering this weekend to discuss energy and the future. Nova Scotia Power's "Energy Forum" will bring together 150 people from across the province to talk about how we should meet our future energy needs.

Ralph Tedesco, Nova Scotia Power's Chief Operating Officer, says it is essential that the company reach out and engage its customers and stakeholders. "The province has made clear its desire to address generation, supply and emissions issues. These are big questions, far bigger than Nova Scotia Power, and they require the input of Nova Scotians."

These citizens, randomly selected by an independent polling company, will attend sessions on issues including fossil fuels, renewable energy, the environment and energy conservation. Experts in various fields and from different backgrounds will be participating in panel discussions with participants.

"I am happy to be involved because I think we need opinions from the people who matter, the people who pay the bills, and who are concerned about the issues," says John Woods, Executive Director of the Electricity Consumers Alliance of Nova Scotia.

Woods is one of 15 members of a broad based Advisory Committee, representing a number of stakeholder groups, that has helped Nova Scotia Power plan the 1 1/2-day workshop. "I think Nova Scotia Power can capitalize on this opportunity. What better way than to get the grassroots together to do this? When people have the right information they make the right decisions," he says.

The forum uses a process called Deliberative Polling®, never before used in Canada. Created by Professor James Fishkin, a communication and political science professor, and director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at California's Stanford University, the technique combines large and small group discussions and surveys to capture public opinion on important issues.

Deliberative Polling® has been used over 25 times in countries including

Great Britain, Australia, Denmark, and the U.S. to look at issues like crime, the introduction of the Euro, the monarchy, and electricity. Its intent is to collect informed opinion rather than "off the top of the head" opinion.

"I thought, wow, this is fascinating as an exercise to educate people and bring them together," says Carole McDougall, Director of Communications of the United Way of Halifax Region. "Nova Scotia Power isn't bringing their friends to the table. There is a framework that's been used before and they are being vigilant and scrupulous to bring a broad range of people to the discussion."

McDougall, also a member of the Advisory Committee, says it is important to take the time to ask the public's ideas for the future. "This is an opportunity to focus and get engaged in the future of energy in the province and how we want to manage that."

Tedesco says the forum will help balance three considerations: the environment, energy prices and the economy. "Where should the fulcrum be placed to balance each of these things? It's essential we reach out and engage our customers and stakeholders. We want to find out what strikes them as reasonable. We want to balance reliable, inexpensive and clean energy. Nova Scotians are capable of addressing that. Our commitment is to listen to what they say and factor it into our planning."