



# IMPROVE

## Conventional Energy Methods

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RENEWABLES | SMART GRID | STORAGE | SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY | SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSES



## VALUING THE KNOWLEDGE OF INUIT IN DIESEL-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES

**Nicholas Mercer, Paul Parker, Amy Hudson,  
Debbie Martin**

Of 259 off-grid communities in Canada, 190 depend almost exclusively on diesel to generate electricity. And although the majority of these communities identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis, little work has been done to understand Indigenous views on energy sustainability.

To help change that, the NunatuKavut Community Council partnered with WISE member Nick Mercer to undertake research in southeast Labrador into local perspectives on energy. Mercer teamed up with fellow WISE member Paul Parker, and Inuit researchers Amy Hudson and Debbie Martin to interview residents from the Inuit diesel-dependent communities of Black Tickle, St. Lewis and Norman Bay.

Their findings reveal that 35 per cent of community members support diesel generation, while 35 per cent were neutral, 24% reported being strongly or somewhat opposed, and 1% responded that they 'Do Not Know'. Respondents said they felt comfortable and familiar with the technology, which they've used since the 1970s or earlier. They also pointed to its reliability, which is particularly important in harsh northern climates. Moreover, diesel generation created high-paying, full-time jobs, from operating equipment to shoveling snow around the diesel plant. Diesel plant operators were found to be important to the sustainability of their communities; using their expertise and skills to support other community members.

However, community members expressed concerns about costs, greenhouse gas emissions, noise pollution and how potential fuel spills could impact hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. They also highlighted the challenges of relying on subsidies and outside fuel suppliers.

As Canada continues working to cut carbon emissions, understanding the expertise, views and needs of Inuit communities is increasingly important. This qualitative analysis helps close the research gap, identifying the perceived strengths and challenges of current off-grid systems. At the same time, it reinforces the need to empower, support, and engage Indigenous communities on questions of sustainable energy development.

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**Partners:** *NunatuKavut Community Council, Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada*

**Source:** Mercer, N., Parker, P., Hudson, A., & Martin, D. (2020). Off-grid energy sustainability in NunatuKavut, Labrador: Centering Inuit voices on heat insecurity in diesel-powered communities. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 62, 101382.

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