

Management of UK low level radioactive waste

Drigg is a fine and well-protected site. This consultation of politicians and activists will hardly select a better option. It will simply expand NIMBY.

Press Zoom
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Proposals have been published today for the long-term management of solid low-level radioactive waste.

Lowlevel radioactive waste includes paper, plastics, and scrap metal mainly from the operation of nuclear facilities. Smaller amounts are also produced by a range of non-nuclear industries such as hospitals, research and educational facilities and the oil and gas industries. Most of these wastes are currently sent to the national low level waste disposal facility near Drigg in Cumbria.

The review of low level radioactive waste policy will examine options to:

- minimise waste
- manage very low level wastes more appropriately
- reduce transport of low level waste

Environment Minister Ross Finnie said:

"We are committed to managing safely the legacy of Scotland's nuclear industry and the low level radioactive wastes that are generated from other users of radioactivity. "We would encourage all those with an interest to respond to this consultation."

The consultation period runs until May 31, 2006

The UK Government, the Scottish Executive, The Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment have jointly prepared the consultation.

Most LLW has been sent to the national LLW disposal facility located close to Drigg in Cumbria. The national facility is filling up and new options for the long term management of these wastes are needed.

The latest United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory, published last month, estimates that some 21 thousand cubic metres of low level radioactive waste (LLW), about 31 thousand tonnes, are awaiting disposal. A further two million cubic metres, about 2.8 million tonnes, of low level waste, such as soil, building rubble and items such as ducting, piping and reinforcement, will arise from decommissioning activities on nuclear sites.

Although most waste will come from nuclear sites, Government is commissioning a study on the extent and geographical distribution of waste from non-nuclear industry producers.

Some LLW, which is at the lower end of the activity concentration range, has been disposed of at its point of arising and, in small amounts, to some specified landfill sites. Very low activity LLW (VLLW) has been disposed to conventional landfills where the waste is diluted by significant quantities of other non-radioactive wastes. Incineration is also used for some combustible waste, particularly clinical waste from hospitals. A

decision to stop plans to move low level radioactive waste from Dounreay to Cumbria was announced in May 2005.

Scottish Ministers directed SEPA to refuse an application from UKAEA for authorisation to dispose of solid waste to the National Low Level Waste Facility near Drigg. The decision reflected a widespread view that the best practicable environmental option for this LLW was that it should be dealt with at Dounreay, where it is produced.

The NDA is a cross-border public authority, set up under the Energy Act 2004. The Scottish Ministers have a key role in approving its Strategies and Plans as they affect Scotland. The NDA is responsible for the National LLW facility near Drigg and most of the UK's LLW arising from decommissioning of nuclear sites. Further information is available at: www.nda.gov.uk