

Nuclear Waste to Be Stored in Cave

Openness is the best policy. Much of this waste is harmless.

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South Korea said Wednesday that it will excavate a deep cave at a nuclear repository in the south-eastern part of the country to store low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste.

The circular-shaped cave at the Kyeongju nuclear repository will be dug into rock 80 meters beneath the surface and have enough space to hold 100,000 drums of waste products, including protective clothing, air filters and gloves, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy said.

"The use of the cave has been viewed by experts from Spain and Finland to be the safest way to hold the waste," a government official said, adding that other experts and local public sentiment had been considered as well.

Construction on the first stage of the project will be completed by the end of 2009. Besides the cave, the government will build a temporary holding facility on the surface, along with buildings to conduct testing of the waste site to pick up signs of any contamination.

The ministry said that once the first phase is completed, plans to build additional holding facilities to house 700,000 drums of waste will be decided on later. The historic city of Kyeongju, about 371 kilometers southeast of Seoul, was selected as the site for the nuclear waste through a popular vote.