

News story: Game changing progress in Sellafield pond

For the first time ever, empty nuclear fuel skips have been removed from the floor of the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond – one of the most hazardous facilities in Europe.

The breakthrough came after Sellafield Ltd worked with Appleby-based engineering firm Barrnon to make containers to safely store the skips elsewhere on the site.

A Sellafield Ltd team worked with Barrnon to add extra shielding and wooden braces to 50 shipping containers, enabling an initial 100 skips to be removed from the pond.

The approach applies learning from skip operations at other nuclear sites in the UK.

More than 1,200 Magnox skips rest on the floor of the pond, which was originally used to store nuclear fuel for atomic weapons.

Clearing them out makes it much easier to remove other hazards like sludge, a by-product formed from decaying nuclear fuel, algae, and other debris.

Dorothy Gradden, head of legacy ponds at Sellafield, said:

This is a game changer for us and the most significant step yet in getting clutter out of the pond.

It gives us the elbow room we need to crack on with the waste retrievals and is the latest example of how simple solutions are delivering hazard and risk reduction on the site.

Next year the team plans to use robotic lasers to cut up and flat pack the skips in order to remove and store them even more efficiently.

Now 66 years old, the open-air fuel pond is one of the 4 high hazard buildings at Sellafield prioritised for clean-up by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

Duncan Thompson, Sellafield programme director for the NDA said:

It's great to see lessons learned elsewhere in the NDA estate being applied to the mission at Sellafield.

This is another example of the considerable progress being made in removing the hazard from the pond.