

News story: Sellafield tackles its biggest risk yet

Highly radioactive 'liquor' has been taken out of one of the oldest parts of the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo for the first time.

The material has been inside the waste store for many decades.

It was created when water was used to cover the waste so it could not ignite.

New networks of heavily shielded pipes have been built to help get take the material out of the building.

Teams from Sellafield Ltd and supply chain companies recently transferred the first batch.

Chris Halliwell, of Sellafield Ltd, said:

This has been one of our biggest technical and engineering challenges to date.

The first transfer worked just as planned.

The team can now press on with meticulously making each transfer, reducing the hazard posed by our biggest current risk.

The clean-up of the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo is one of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) highest priority programmes.

Duncan Thompson, head of Sellafield programme for the NDA, said:

The clean-up of the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo is one of our highest priority programmes.

It is a highly complex task involving the removal of many different types of waste.

I'm delighted to see the progress being made in removing radioactive liquor.

This work will make Sellafield and the UK a safer place.

The building contains 22 vertical compartments that store waste from the UK's first generation of nuclear power stations.

It was constructed without plans for how the waste would eventually be taken out.

The building is no longer suitable for long-term storage of nuclear waste.

As a result, innovative solutions are being deployed to retrieve waste from what is effectively a locked vault.

Work to 'scoop' solid waste out of the store, using the first of three 350-tonne mobile emptying machines, is scheduled to start next year.

They will be locked into position above each compartment and the waste pulled out through an opening. It will then be transferred to new buildings at Sellafield for treatment and interim storage, pending final disposal at the UK's Geological Disposal Facility.

The silo will then be fully decommissioned and demolished.