

Press release: Chemicals disposal investigation: findings published

Sellafield Ltd has today published the findings of an internal investigation into the disposal of potentially hazardous chemicals at our site last year.

In October 2017, a chemicals inventory check in our Analytical Services building identified potentially hazardous chemicals requiring safe disposal.

In line with industry best practice, we requested the assistance of the Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team to assist with these disposals.

The EOD disposed of the identified chemicals, along with other potentially hazardous chemicals subsequently identified, using the recognised safest method: controlled detonation on the Sellafield site.

Following the safe conclusion of these operations, we initiated an internal investigation to understand the root causes and recommend steps to improve our future handling of these substances.

The investigation has now concluded. It found the following:

There were 2 root causes:

1. Our approach to conventional (non-radiological) safety is not always tailored to the risks and hazards of individual facilities
2. Priority was not given to the disposal of redundant chemicals. This was because they were out of the conscious awareness of the majority of people within Analytical Services

Additional findings:

- All of the redundant chemicals involved were on our chemical inventory but there was a lack of recognition of the risk associated with their degradation
- A strong nuclear safety culture resulted in the risk being identified by employees

The investigation proposed recommendations:

1. A site-wide review of potentially hazardous chemicals identified as requiring non-immediate action following last year's inventory check. This will clarify who is responsible and will develop and implement a new approach for future chemical disposal.
2. An external benchmarking exercise to understand best practice for the management of complex chemical inventories.

3. A review of existing contracts to ensure specialist chemical advice and ongoing support is in place.
4. A new system for the oversight and control of chemical inventories.

Steve Bostock, Sellafield Ltd chief operating officer, said:

The Sellafield site is home to some of the oldest and most complex risks and hazards anywhere in the world.

It is our responsibility to make sure these hazards are managed in a way that protects our workforce, the local community and the environment.

We take this responsibility very seriously, which is why I initiated an investigation into last year's chemicals disposal event at the earliest opportunity.

I'm confident we now have a full understanding of the circumstances and an improved approach to the management of chemicals, which will also inform our approach to other potential hazards on our site.

PDF, 28.4KB, 3 pages

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