

Press release: Local communities to give views on permanent disposal of radioactive waste

- New consultations on a permanent solution for the disposal of the UK's radioactive waste launched today
- Geological disposal is internationally recognised and secures waste at least 200 metres underground
- Construction of disposal facilities will only take place if local communities give their consent

A safe, responsible, long-term solution for the permanent disposal of radioactive waste is the focus of 2 new consultations launched today by the government.

The UK has long generated radioactive waste most of which is low in radioactivity and is disposed of safely every day – from power stations to use in a range of industrial applications including medicine and defence. Some materials need more specialised disposal facilities and this waste is currently held safely in stores above ground. It is not sustainable to keep storing past and future waste on a temporary basis.

A Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) is internationally recognised as the safest and most secure way to permanently dispose of higher activity radioactive waste. This involves placing this waste at least 200 metres underground in a highly engineered facility made up of multiple layers of materials such as steel, rock and clay to provide protection while some of the waste remains radioactive – ensuring that no harmful quantities of radioactivity ever reach the surface.

The construction of a GDF would also support a new generation of nuclear power stations in the UK, by providing a safe and secure way to dispose of the waste they produce. It will create up to 2,000 well-paid, skilled jobs and bring at least £8 billion to the UK economy over the lifetime of the facility.

Energy Minister Richard Harrington said:

We owe it to future generations to take action now to find a suitable permanent site for the safe disposal of our radioactive waste. And it is right that local communities have a say. Planning consent will only be given to sites which have local support.

Mr Harrington added:

As the government set out in our Industrial Strategy, the nuclear sector has a key role to play in increasing productivity and driving clean growth. Nuclear is a vital part of our energy mix, providing low carbon power now and into the future.

Professor Iain Stewart, Director of the Sustainable Earth Institute, Plymouth University, said:

A geological disposal facility is widely accepted as the only realistic way to dispose of higher activity nuclear waste for the long-term.

Geological disposal facilities are already being developed in Finland, Sweden, France, and Canada.

The first consultation, [Working with communities](#) sets out how the project developer will engage with people in areas that may be interested in hosting a disposal facility to seek their views and the second, on the proposed [National Policy Statement](#), will create a rigorous planning process.

Radioactive Waste Management Ltd (RWM) will deliver geological disposal on behalf of the government.

Ann McCall, Radioactive Waste Management's GDF Siting and Engagement Director, said:

Geological disposal will provide a safe, secure and long-term solution to managing the UK's radioactive waste, and RWM welcomes the public consultations launched today which place communities at the heart of the process.

Notes to editors:

1. Both consultations will run for 12 weeks. The Working with Communities consultation will apply to England and Northern Ireland. The Welsh Government is conducting its own consultation on Working with Communities in parallel with the UK Government. The Scottish Government has its own policy on the management of radioactive waste.

[Working with communities: implementing geological disposal](#)

2. The National Policy Statement consultation will apply to England only. It will require parliamentary scrutiny by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee and could be subject to a Parliamentary debate and vote.

[National Policy Statement for geological disposal infrastructure](#)

3. Higher activity radioactive waste is produced from the generation of electricity in nuclear power stations, the production and reprocessing

of nuclear fuel and the use of radioactive materials in industry, medicine, research and nuclear defence.