

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.

[News story: The Veterans' Gateway records over 10,000 enquiries as it celebrates its first year in service](#)

Designed to offer a one stop shop through which veterans can access advice on a vast range of areas, from housing to health concerns, the Veterans' Gateway has seen over 37,000 click throughs to external sites, with the majority of users requesting advice on finance.

With requests coming from as far afield as Thailand, South Africa and St Maarten in the Caribbean, the service caters to veterans of all ages and backgrounds. 81% of users are under 65 years old, and 56% of web visitors access the site via mobile phones.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are committed to delivering for our veterans, and the Veterans' Gateway is making sure those who served our country are getting the support they and their families need.

This £2m project has helped 10,000 ex-service men and women in its first year, making the transition between service and civilian life as smooth as possible.

Every day our troops and veterans inspire our nation and it is right we deliver for them in return for the sacrifices they have made.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood today visited the Veterans' Gateway service centre near Cardiff in South Wales. He met with veterans who now work as call handlers, using their experiences in the Armed Forces to benefit others, and giving back to the service community.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

The vast majority of veterans go on to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and most find employment within six months of leaving the military. But we need to offer support to those who find the transition more challenging.

I'm proud to see the great work that goes on behind the scenes of the Veterans' Gateway, and I've been inspired by the community spirit of all who dedicate their time and knowledge to supporting those in need.

The 24-hour service is delivered by a Royal British Legion-led consortium with Poppyscotland, Combat Stress, Connect Assist, the Ministry of Defence and SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity.

Charles Byrne, Director General of The Royal British Legion, on behalf of the Veterans' Gateway consortium, said:

The number of people contacting the Veterans' Gateway continues to grow and we are reaching new groups of people including young veterans who need our support in finding the right information, advice and help.

We have also seen increasing numbers of users being able to self-refer and gain better access to the services available to them. The Veterans' Gateway can become a key resource for veterans and their families seeking support. With over 30 referral partners, it is truly a team of teams.

[Press release: M4 smart motorway plans to go on show this weekend](#)

32 miles of the M4 will have an extra lane created in both directions, with upgraded signs, signals and technology to inform drivers about conditions ahead.

Plans about the upgrade are going on show this weekend, Saturday 7 July, with the first of six public events ahead of main construction starting later this year.

Drivers, business owners and local residents are invited to find out more about the plans, which will add an extra lane in each direction to the M4 between junction 3, near Hayes, and junction 12 at Theale, to upgrade it to an all-lane-running smart motorway. New technology will help to manage traffic to reduce delays and give drivers up to date information about conditions on the road ahead.

Work is due to start this autumn on the stretch between junctions 8/9 and 10, between Maidenhead and Wokingham. Six public information events are being held in the area, starting in Maidenhead this weekend, and visiting Wokingham, Theale and Reading over the next two weeks.

The M4 smart motorway scheme has already been through a comprehensive consultation as part of the complex planning process, and people interested in finding out more about the plans are encouraged to attend an event and put

any questions directly to the project team. Further events will take place early next year between junctions 8/9 and junction 3 (Hayes).

Highways England delivery director Mike Grant said:

Upgrading the M4 to a smart motorway between junctions 3 and 12 is a massive job and will provide huge benefits not only to the 130,000 drivers using it each day by tackling congestion and improving journey times, but also for business travellers and holiday makers using the corridor to get to and from the airports in the south, as well as residents and businesses based in the area.

Smart motorways add vital capacity to our motorway network and are central to our ambitious plans for modernising the motorway network, adding 120 miles of new lanes to motorways in the South East by 2020. Drivers will also see better information about conditions through new smart motorway technology which helps us to manage incidents, smooth traffic flow, make journeys more reliable and improve journey times, while maintaining high levels of safety.

The public exhibitions starting this weekend are an ideal place for anyone interested in the upgrade of the M4 to a smart motorway to meet the project team and find out more.

The M4 is the main strategic route between London, the west of England and Wales.

Under the plans, the hard shoulder will be permanently converted into a live running lane between junctions 3 and 12 in both directions. New signs and signals will be used to vary the speed limit to reduce congestion at busy times, and to control traffic if there is an obstruction on the road ahead.

Work is scheduled to start in September this year, and will be carried out in phases, with the smart motorway being fully operational in spring 2022.

[Public information events](#) are starting this weekend (Saturday 7 July, Holyport War Memorial Hall, near Maidenhead) with a further five events running until Thursday 19 July in Reading. People are encouraged to attend to find out more about the plans and put any questions directly to the project team. Further events will be held over the next few months along the route of the scheme.

Anyone interested in the scheme can visit the [project page](#) on the Highways England website.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Scottish employers to repay employees thousands](#)

The UK Government has published a list of the names of more than 24 employers headquartered in Scotland, found to have underpaid more than 300 Scottish workers by a total of £60,000.

Employers underpaid workers by taking deductions from wages for uniforms, underpaying apprentices and failing to pay travel time.

£1.42m in back pay has been identified for 23,000 workers across the UK, with the employers fined additional £1.97m.

UK-wide companies including Home Bargains and Card Factory (who have significant presences in Scotland) have also been identified as underpaying their employees.

The back pay identified by HMRC affects more UK workers than in any previous list and has generated record fines of £1.95m.

The earliest underpayment dated back to 2011, with the most recent happening this year (2018).

Business Minister Andrew Griffiths said:

Our priority is making sure workers know their rights and are getting the pay they worked hard for. Employers who don't do the right thing face fines as well as being hit with the bill for backpay.

The UK's lowest paid workers have had the fastest wage growth in 20 years thanks to the introduction of the National Living Wage and today's list serves as a reminder to all employers to check they are getting their workers' pay right.

UK Government Minister Lord Duncan said:

It beggars belief that some employers think they can get away with underpaying staff and tricking them out of the wage to which they

are legally entitled. That's why we are naming shaming and fining these companies. We won't stop until every employee in Scotland is paid correctly and fairly for their labours.

The top 5 reasons for National Minimum and Living Wage underpayments in this list were:

- Taking deductions from wages for costs such as uniforms
- Underpaying apprentices
- Failing to pay travel time
- Misusing the accommodation offset
- Using the wrong time periods for calculating pay.

Low Pay Commission Chairman Bryan Sanderson said:

It is crucial that employers understand their responsibilities and workers know their rights around the minimum wage. That is why active enforcement and effective communication from UK Government is so important.

It is therefore encouraging to see that HMRC has recovered unpaid wages for the largest number of workers yet in this round of naming and shaming. I'm confident that the UK Government will continue to pursue underpayment of the minimum wage vigorously.

Funding for minimum wage enforcement has more than doubled since 2015, with the UK Government set to spend £26.3m in 2018/19.

The scheme is in its fifth year and calls out employers who have fallen foul of minimum wage laws, so far identifying £10.8m in back pay for around 90,000 workers, with more than 1,900 employers fined a total of £8.4m. HMRC has launched a series of webinars, available on GOV.UK, to help employers check that they are complying with the law.

The UK Government is currently running a campaign to raise awareness of the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates, which increased on 1 April 2018, as well as encouraging workers who have been underpaid to complain to HMRC. The campaign website has had more than 600,000 visits since the campaign began on 1 April.

Employers who pay workers less than the minimum wage have to pay back arrears of wages to the worker at current minimum wage rates and face financial penalties of up to 200% of arrears, capped at £20,000 per worker.

For more information about your pay, or if you think you might be being underpaid, get advice and guidance at [gov.uk/checkyourpay](https://www.gov.uk/checkyourpay). Workers can also seek advice from workplace experts Acas.

[News story: Liz Truss encourages West Midlands independent businesses to embrace export opportunities](#)

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss has praised independent and start-up businesses in West Midlands as the “engine of the Midlands economy” and revealed that first quarter exports from the West Midlands were worth more than £8.8 billion alone, up on last year.

Speaking during a roundtable event with a group of small businesses in Birmingham today (Thursday 5 July), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss, said:

We know that small businesses and entrepreneurs in Birmingham are doing great work creating jobs and powering economic growth for the Midlands.

The employment rate in the West Midlands has increased faster than any other UK region during 2018, and this is in part thanks to successful independent businesses.

To continue this positive trend, it’s important that businesses in this region have as much opportunity as possible to increase their trade and create jobs and I’m here today to learn about how we can help them do this.

The employment rate in the West Midlands is at a record high level with 2.8 million people in work. There are also 92,000 more businesses in the West Midlands now when compared to 2010.