First marine geophysical surveys set to start this summer

News story

Investigations off the coast to provide data about potential of deep rocks to host a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

The survey vessel will be carrying specialist acoustic equipment

The marine geophysical surveys off the coast of Copeland, Cumbria, which are set to begin in the summer of 2022, are non-intrusive and will provide a better understanding of the rock structure to help inform the search for a suitable site for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

The data-gathering programme will use a vessel carrying specialist acoustic equipment deployed between 5 and 20km from the coastline. The work will take place over a period of three to four weeks and will be undertaken by specialists Shearwater GeoServices, who were awarded a £6 million contract by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) following a procurement process.

The survey is an important early step in beginning to understand the deep geology beyond the coast. This first survey is focused off the coast of South and Mid Copeland.

The technology deployed from the 92-metre vessel is based on sound waves – similar to ultrasound scans used for medical purposes – which are reflected as an echo from different geological layers. This enables a 3D picture of the underlying rocks to be gradually built up. The seabed itself remains undisturbed. Surveys of this type are commonplace in the offshore wind, oil and gas sectors.

The GDF team will work with marine representative bodies and other stakeholders to keep marine users and local communities informed of developments.

Chris Eldred, Head of GDF Geosphere Characterisation, said:

> We are looking forward to the commencement of the first surveys this summer off the south west coast of Copeland, working with the specialists at Shearwater GeoServices.
>
> The information we gather will help us to further consider the suitability of areas to host a GDF and support informed dialogue with the communities that are at the heart of the siting process.

Data from the surveys will need to be processed and analysed in detail which will take about nine months during which time we will consider how or if further survey work is needed. The information will give our geologists and engineers some of the tools they need to begin designing and planning the next steps in the search for a suitable site for a GDF.

Learn more about geological disposal.

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E-seminar: Screening for GMOs in consignments of rice and rice products

News story

This e-seminar describes best practice in screening for GMOs in consignments of rice and rice products originating from China

This e-seminar provides an introduction to current official methods employed when screening for GMOs in consignments of rice and rice products originating from China. Background to the issue, legislation relevant to the regulation of GMOs, as well as guidance and best practice on the implementation of the official methods is described. An explanation of the interpretation of results, information on recognised sources of appropriate reference materials, and advice on experimental design are also provided.

The e-seminar is intended for individuals working in official control laboratories, the food industry and those involved with the UK official control system.

The production of this e-seminar was co-funded by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Food Standards Agency, Food Standards Scotland and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) via the Government Chemist Programme, under the Joint Knowledge Transfer Framework for Food Standards and Food Safety Analysis.

Screening for GMOs in consignments of rice and rice products originating from China

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Supply of accessible homes to receive vital boost

- Government responds to consultation on raising accessibility standards in new homes
- Confirms next steps on plans to raise minimum accessibility requirements
- Leading stakeholders welcome “positive step”

New homes will be more accessible for older and disabled people as the government today (29 July) confirms plans to raise the accessibility standard following full consultation of proposals.

The raising accessibility standards for new homes consultation proposed staying with the existing framework for accessible housing, reconsidering the way existing standards are used or raising the minimum standard. We are now committing to raising the minimum standard, giving people the dignity and security they deserve in their homes.

Raising the minimum accessibility standard will require all new homes to have step-free access to all entrance level rooms and facilities as well as further features to make homes more easily adaptable over time, supporting people to live independent lives.

Since 2010 we have given councils over £4.5 billion to deliver almost half a million home adaptations. Current planning rules already mean councils must consider the needs of older and disabled people when planning for new homes.

This change means older and disabled people can live more independently in their own homes, with greater choice and control over their lives, and be able to work, socialise and contribute to society as fully as possible. It

will ‘future proof’ new homes for successive generations, saving costs associated with moving or adapting homes.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes said:

> Older and disabled people must have homes which are suitable for their needs, and allow them to live comfortably and independently.
>
> This consultation has made clear raising the accessibility standard of new homes is supported not just by people who use accessible homes, but by industry and wider stakeholders as well.
>
> With that mandate, we are forging ahead with the next steps to make this a reality.

Holly Holder, Co-Chair of the Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) coalition, said:

> We warmly welcome the government’s decision to raise the minimum accessibility standard as a positive step towards resolving the significant shortage of accessible and adaptable new homes in this country.
>
> Raising the standard of accessibility has the potential to change millions of lives but only if executed well and with very limited exceptions to the way the revised regulation is applied. Homes with higher accessibility standards benefit everyone, particularly disabled people and older people, and disadvantage no one.

Christina McGill, Co-Chair of the Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) coalition, said:

> The need for accessible homes is going to grow significantly over the next 20 years as our population ages. Improving mandatory access standards will remove many of the barriers currently limiting the number of accessible homes being built and help deliver the right quality of homes for everyone.
>
> We look forward to further discussions with the government on the next phase of consultation. This must be carried out with urgency and address the finer details needed to deliver on the promise of housing that is suitable and accessible for people throughout their lives.

Kerry Thompson, disability blogger/influencer, said:

> Today’s announcement will bring in welcome changes to accessibility

> standards in new homes.
>
> Living in an accessible Habinteg Housing Association home myself, I know first-hand just how beneficial they can be for a disabled person. For me it makes the difference between just existing and having a life to live. An accessible home can enable greater independence.
>
> The accessible adaptable standard will make adaptations more achievable and economically beneficial and in the long term will alleviate pressures on health and social care services and budgets.
>
> I am looking forward to seeing the progress that comes from these changes because living in an accessible home shouldn't be seen as a luxury.

Responses were significantly in favour of raising the minimum accessibility standard. From over 400 responses to the consultation, an overwhelming 98% supported government's intention to raise accessibility standards of new homes. The most favoured options were the two that included mandating a higher accessibility standard.

A second consultation will be carried out in due course. It will cover the detail of the regulatory changes, including updates to statutory guidance as well as the circumstances where exceptions to applying the higher standard will apply.

Robotic superhero meets identical twin in fusion energy machine

A Jenga-playing robot with a human touch used to maintain a fusion energy machine – where temperatures can be hotter than the sun – has been reunited with its identical superhero twin for the first time since 1999.

Both known as MASCOT, the highly dextrous manipulators are being put through their paces in a series of practice 'rescue missions', where each saves its stranded sibling to limit potential disruption to world-leading fusion energy research at the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), Oxfordshire.

The development of 'self-recovering' robots to go where humans can't, is key to making fusion energy a safe, sustainable, low-carbon energy source for generations to come.

The £1.5 million, 32-month project has been funded by the EUROfusion programme and worked on by over 40 engineers at UKAEA's robotics laboratory,

RACE (Remote Applications in Challenging Environments) to support future science experiments on fusion energy machines including JET and its successor, ITER, in the south of France along with fusion powerplants.

Gary Hermon, Remote Handling Lead Technologist at UKAEA, said: “Robotic systems are an integral part of putting fusion energy on the grid for the design and maintenance of future fusion powerplants. We can’t afford to have a robot that gets stuck!

“The second MASCOT is now in place to train our remote handling team in rescue tasks ensuring its twin can always be saved when working on the maintenance of JET, our machine where EUROfusion researchers set a sustained fusion energy record announced earlier this year.”

JET is the currently the only fusion energy machine in the world that uses remote handling and robotics for maintenance, placing the UK at the forefront of this technology and expertise.

The meeting of the two MASCOTs is shown in this video where engineers compete in a game of Jenga to hone their skills.

Each MASCOT has two arms with grippers that can operate over 900 bespoke tools. The MASCOTs are each deployed into JET – or its replica training vessel – on the end of an articulated 12-metre boom, driven by UKAEA’s remote handing team from a control room fitted out with live camera feeds and VR screens for additional precision views.

Skilled operators use two robot arms to control each MASCOT as it performs tasks including replacing tiles, welding, cutting, dust collecting and surveying to maintain UKAEA’s fusion energy machine.

Robotics and other advanced technologies developed for fusion are expected to be useful for applications across other sectors such as nuclear decommissioning, space exploration, mining, healthcare and transport.

To find out more about remote handling and robotics at UKAEA, visit race.ukaea.uk.

Companies House London office and counter services will not be re-opening

News story

The Companies House London office and our counter services in Belfast,

Edinburgh and Cardiff will not be re-opening.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Companies House office in London and the public counters in Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh were closed.

Working with customers, we've put new ways in place to submit documents, enhancing our digital offering and reducing reliance on public counters.

As we continue to transform our services to provide a truly modern and digital service, it's been decided that our public counters will not re-open.

This means that the Companies House office in London, which has been closed since March 2020, will also not be re-opening.

It's quicker and easier to file information online. Our online services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Watch our YouTube videos for guidance on how to use our online services.

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