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Environmental monitoring

Monitoring of discharges

The operation of nuclear facilities generally results in the discharge of radioactivity to the surrounding environment. Nuclear site operators are required to control the amount of radioactivity released into the environment. The national regulator puts controls on the amount and type of radioactivity released into the environment, including imposing upper limits on radioactive discharges.

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Nuclear Safety in Europe - Fourth Regulatory Conference

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Waste management routes under research

Disposal involves the isolation of radioactive wastes in a suitable facility without the intention to retrieve and with minimal requirements of long-term surveillance or maintenance. Internationally, there is general agreement that deep disposal in geological formations, below 300m represents the safest and most sustainable option for the long-term management of high-level waste and spent fuel subject to direct disposal. The concept has evolved over the last few years to incorporate extended monitoring and the possibility for its retrieval if required in the future.

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Existing waste management routes

For very low level waste, low level waste and short-lived intermediate level waste, there is international consensus that this can be safely disposed of in near-surface facilities at a depth of no more than 30 m. The underlying assumption is that deposited radioactive waste will decay to background levels before institutional control is lost (within about 300 years).

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Categorisation of radioactive waste

Radioactive waste means radioactive material in gaseous, liquid or solid form for which no further use is foreseen [definition given by the [Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management](#)]

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Management of spent fuel

Spent fuel is the name given to nuclear fuel that has been removed from a nuclear power or research reactor following irradiation. It is a mixture of plutonium, uranium and waste materials and is no longer usable as fuel. It is extremely radioactive and generates a large amount of heat and must be carefully managed. Individual Member States take different approaches to the long-term management of spent fuel, but all involve a period of interim storage at the nuclear power plant or research reactor site following the removal of the fuel from the reactor.

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Nuclear safety directive

Directive 2009/71/EURATOM establishing a Community framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations and its amendment, Directive 2014/87/Euratom

Worldwide, the nuclear safety of nuclear installations is governed by national legislation and the international conventions. Within the EU, this is being supplemented by an EU Directive.

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Basic safety standards directive

EU legislation in the field of safety

The EU also supports radiation protection through legislation contained in a series of Directives. Across the EU, the current Basic Safety Standards Directive (96/29/Euratom) sets out standards for radiation protection in the Member States.

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United Kingdom

Nuclear regulatory authority

The designated UK Nuclear Regulatory Authority responsible for regulating safety and security is the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR). Since 1 April 2014 ONR has operated as an independent statutory body (a "public corporation"), having previously been part of the Health and Safety Executive. ONR is responsible for regulating nuclear safety, health and safety on nuclear sites, nuclear security, nuclear safeguards and the transport of radioactive material.

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Sweden

Nuclear regulatory authority

The Swedish Radiation Safety Authority (SSM) is the regulatory authority for nuclear safety, radiation protection, nuclear security and nuclear non-proliferation. SSM works proactively and preventively to maintain a high level of nuclear safety and radiation protection in Sweden and internationally.

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