

Briefing note

Radioactive Substances Regulation

Nuclear Regulation Group our role

Nuclear power stations currently provide about a fifth of the electricity we use in our homes and businesses. A complex industry surrounds power stations, to manage and support their work. Nuclear is also at the heart of our national defence and medical industries. It is our job to regulate how nuclear sites manage and dispose of radioactive and other waste to protect people and the environment.

Who are we?

We are part of the Environment Agency's approach to managing radioactive substances regulation. A group of specialist inspectors, we focus on regulating sites licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. We are divided into two Nuclear Regulation Groups; NRG (North) based at Penrith, Cumbria, covering northern England and North Wales, and NRG (South), in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, which serves the South of England and South Wales.

Each group has eleven experienced inspectors split into two teams and up to three technical support officers.

Who do we regulate?

There are 33 licensed nuclear sites in England and Wales that carry out a range of activities, from nuclear power production and defence related activities through to decommissioning and clean-up.

Operators of these sites must have an authorisation from us to dispose of their radioactive waste. Through these permits, we oversee how each site disposes of its



radioactive waste, including discharges to air and water. We also check that operators produce the minimum amount of radioactive waste and release as little as possible into the environment, as well as checking that they stay within their limits.

What is our role?

Our main role is to inspect sites to make sure that they are working within the law. We also aim to influence and educate site managers and staff to achieve the highest standards of environmental protection.

Some of our specific duties include:

- Assessing applications for new, or variations to existing, permits for nuclear sites;
- Reviewing nuclear site authorisations to make sure they are still appropriate and setting appropriate limits and conditions;
- Inspecting sites, equipment, plant and arrangements;
- Investigating incidents and accidents and taking enforcement action if necessary;



- Informing the public about the regulatory process and seeking views from people;
- Providing advice on waste disposal facilities, applying best practicable means to minimise waste and ensuring the best practicable environmental option for disposing of waste;
- Working with operators and the Environment Agency's monitoring team to monitor the radiological impact of site operations on the environment and local community through waste, effluent and environmental monitoring programmes and the assessment of public radiation exposure; and
- Communicating with technical specialists from non-radiological disciplines within the Environment Agency in our role as main contact between the nuclear licensed sites, site stakeholder or liaison group, the public, other regulators and official bodies and the Environment Agency as a whole.

Emergency response

We also have a role to play if an incident at a nuclear site has an impact beyond the site or in the event of an overseas nuclear incident that may affect the UK. We will advise on how the incident might affect the general environment or the water supply. We will also give advice on decontamination, clean-up and waste disposal.

The Nuclear Regulation Groups regularly take part in emergency exercises and response planning.

A modern regulator

We support Governments work with regulators to achieve 'better regulation' and reduce the

burden we place on businesses, whilst still meeting our regulatory goals. We will do this by targeting our enforcement action through riskbased assessment, applying the law and securing compliance in a proportionate and consistent way, and, at all times, being open and transparent about how we operate and what those we regulate may expect from us.

Further information

For further information visit our website (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/nuclear>).

You can use our interactive maps at <http://maps.environment-agency.gov.uk/wiyby> to find out more about the environment where you live.

About this briefing

This briefing is part of a series which highlight our work in the area of regulating radioactive substances. Our other briefings include: Regulating radioactive substances - our role, Non-nuclear permitting, Assessing radiation doses and Radioactivity in food and the environment.

You can find these briefings by typing 'rsr' in the keyword search on our publications catalogue (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk>).

For further information visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk/nuclear