

JOINT COMPANY NOTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

PLUTONIUM CONTAMINATED MATERIALS

The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is responsible for discharging the liabilities on civil public sector nuclear sites in a safe, secure and environmentally responsible way. The NDA is publicly funded and is entrusted with maximising efficiencies to minimise the burden on taxpayers. The Health and Safety Executive, through the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, and the Environment Agency, are responsible for the regulation of safety and environmental protection at nuclear sites in England and Wales.

Part of the NDA liabilities includes a form of intermediate level radioactive waste known as plutonium contaminated material. A legacy of plutonium contaminated materials exists at the Sellafield nuclear site and this waste will continue to arise from ongoing and future operations. The ownership of the Sellafield site transferred to the NDA in April 2005, with British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd operating the site on behalf of the NDA.

Plutonium contaminated materials also exist at two other nuclear sites, at Harwell in Oxfordshire and Dounreay in Caithness, both of which are managed on behalf of the NDA by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). The volumes of these wastes stored on the Harwell and Dounreay sites are relatively small compared with the legacy that already exists at Sellafield. Future decommissioning operations at Harwell and Dounreay are anticipated to generate only small volumes of additional plutonium contaminated materials. The UKAEA at Dounreay is currently planning to process and store this waste on the Dounreay site.

As part of its continued development of an integrated approach to waste management, British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd will review potential treatment processes for plutonium contaminated materials to ensure that it is converted into a form that is passively safe, secure and environmentally acceptable. There is already a process in operation at Sellafield for the treatment of this waste. However, a Best Practicable Environmental Option Study (BPEO)¹ study is required to select the preferred treatment option for the longer term.

British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd will consult stakeholders as an integral part of the BPEO study for plutonium contaminated materials to ensure that the assessment of processing options fully considers stakeholder values and views. British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd is focusing upon the recovery and processing of the plutonium contaminated materials at Sellafield in accordance with regulatory requirements.

Continued over....

¹ The concept of BPEO has gained widespread acceptance in the United Kingdom as a result of the work of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, who provided the following definition of BPEO:

"....the outcome of a systematic and consultative decision making procedure which emphasises the protection and conservation of the environment across land, air and water. The BPEO procedure establishes, for a given set of objectives, the option that provides the most benefit or least damage to the environment as a whole, at acceptable cost, in the long term as well as the short term."

The interpretation of BPEO in the context of radioactive waste management has traditionally been taken to involve wide-ranging strategic exploration of the balance between environmental impact, health and safety, technical feasibility and cost.

It may be appropriate, however, to consider whether there would be benefits in the processing and storage of plutonium contaminated materials from Harwell (and possibly Dounreay) at Sellafield, taking account of the NDA national remit for liabilities management. Priority will be given to the processing and storage of plutonium contaminated materials already at Sellafield to meet regulatory requirements and to ensure that safety, security and environmental considerations are adequately addressed.

British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd will be seeking stakeholder feedback on the impact on processing options at Sellafield of the possible transfer of plutonium contaminated materials from Harwell (and possibly Dounreay).

UKAEA at Harwell is currently undertaking a BPEO study for the management of all its wastes and is consulting stakeholders as an integral part of the study. The Harwell study includes assessment of options for the management of its plutonium contaminated materials. The options to be assessed will include on-site processing as well as considering the potential for transfer for processing at other sites, including Sellafield.

The outcome of the Sellafield and Harwell studies will aid the NDA in determining the most appropriate approach for treatment of plutonium contaminated materials on a national basis consistent with the NDA strategy.

British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd and UKAEA recognise that the issue of transfer of plutonium contaminated materials between nuclear sites will be of potential concern to stakeholders. Further information will be made available to stakeholders as the two BPEO studies progress. The timetable for stakeholder consultation at Sellafield is currently under development, but indications are that an information pack will be available in late February or early March 2007, with a consultation event held in late May or early June 2007. Stakeholder consultation at Harwell started in late 2006 and a consultation event will be held in the summer of 2007.

To register as a stakeholder in the Sellafield consultation please contact:

June Shield
Sellafield Communications
British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd
Sellafield
Seascale
Cumbria
CA21 1PG

Tel: 019467 85828.

email: june.t.shield@britishnucleargroup.com

For any further information on the Harwell consultation please contact:

Angela Vincent
Harwell Communications
UKAEA
B392.10
Harwell
Didcot
Oxon
OX11 0RA

Tel: 01235 435234

email: angela.vincent@ukaea.org.uk