

[managing radioactive waste safely]

E-bulletin – October 2010 (interim e-bulletin)

Our Aim is *"to make recommendations to Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council on whether they should participate or not in the Geological Disposal Facility siting process, without commitment to eventually host a facility".*

This e-bulletin provides an update on the work that the West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Partnership is doing for those who have recently registered on our database.

It includes information about the Partnership itself, the upcoming publication of the British Geological Survey (BGS) study of West Cumbria, stage 2 of the Partnership's public and stakeholder engagement programme, dates for Partnership meetings and two frequently asked questions.

The next full e-bulletin will be sent out on 28th October when the BGS study is published. However, these updates will normally be sent out about once every six weeks.

A geological disposal facility for radioactive waste

- The Government has decided to dispose of the UK's higher activity radioactive wastes in an underground repository – known as a geological disposal facility. The Government says that geological disposal involves putting radioactive waste in an engineered underground facility deep inside a suitable rock formation to ensure no harmful quantities of radioactivity ever reach the surface.
- Geological disposal was recommended by an independent committee of experts – the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management – which concluded that it is the best available option. It is also the preferred approach in other countries that have nuclear waste.
- The Government wants to find a location for a repository by a voluntary process – this means they will only seek to build it in a part of the country where the residents agree for it to be constructed.
- The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) says underground vaults and tunnels would probably be at a depth somewhere between 200 and 1,000 metres and extend over several square kilometres, depending on geology and the materials which are disposed of in the facility.

Background to the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership

- Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council have expressed an interest in potentially hosting a repository because a large amount of the higher activity radioactive wastes that would go inside are already being stored above ground at Sellafield.

- The three councils have formed the West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) Partnership to advise them whether or not they should take part in the Government's search for somewhere to locate a repository. The Partnership includes the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (which represents the parish councils), the Lake District National Park Authority, Churches Together in Cumbria and the National Farmers' Union.
- Expressing an interest does not commit West Cumbria to having a repository built here. Even if the local authorities do decide to take part in this process, they could still pull out up until the point where construction is due to begin – probably more than a decade from now.

British Geological Survey 'desk top' study of West Cumbria

- The British Geological Survey (BGS), the UK independent geological experts, was commissioned by the Government to carry out a study of the geology of West Cumbria. The Government will publish the results of this basic geological study at the next Partnership meeting at the Greenhill Hotel in Wigton on Thursday 28th October.
- The BGS study will show how much of Copeland and Allerdale, and up to five kilometres offshore, would definitely be unsuitable for a geological disposal facility.
- The study will rule out areas based on criteria set out by the Government. These criteria are largely based around two key issues – the need to exclude areas in order to reduce the risk of intrusion into a facility by future generations seeking to extract resources, and the need to protect the quality of exploitable groundwater.
- The study will not mean that all the rest of West Cumbria would be suitable for a repository. The surface facilities could also be located in areas that are geologically unsuitable for the underground facilities.
- More rigorous assessment of a wide range of geological and other criteria will only be undertaken if West Cumbria then makes a 'decision to participate' further in the Government process.
- The Partnership commissioned two independent peer reviews on behalf of the community, to ensure this initial geological work was rigorous and accurate.

For further detail, please see the Q&A section below.

Public and stakeholder engagement – second stage (PSE2)

- One of the key roles of the Partnership is to ensure that local people have the information they need to come to their own view on whether or not West Cumbria should fully participate in the Government search for a site for a geological disposal facility. The Partnership will be launching the second stage of its comprehensive public and stakeholder engagement (PSE) programme after the meeting on the 28th of October.
- A key priority in PSE2 will be to significantly raise awareness of the issues involved in the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process. The Partnership is planning a high level of activity in order to raise awareness to the

sort of levels that will enable the public to come to a reasonably informed view about this process.

- PSE2 is an opportunity to get public and stakeholder input to inform the Partnership's judgements on key topics, as well as gather evidence to support the work of the Partnership.
- The PSE2 process will help the Partnership to gain a clearer understanding of the issues that stakeholders and the public have and what information they feel they need. There are a number of key issues on which the Partnership will be providing information and seeking input at this stage:
 - What the Partnership did as a result of public views in PSE1.
 - The process, including voluntarism, timescales, and how a site selection process would work.
 - How a geological disposal facility (GDF) might look above and below ground, its size and what could be in it.
 - The role of the Partnership, public involvement and how a decision will be made.
 - Potential impacts including safety, security and the image of the area.
 - Potential benefits including investment that would naturally come with a facility and what additional community benefits the Government might provide in practice.
 - The results of the study by the British Geological Survey.
- There will be a further round of public and stakeholder engagement around the middle of next year before there is any decision about whether or not West Cumbria should participate in the Government siting process.

How to get involved

- [In the next few months there will be a number of opportunities to find out more about this important issue, ask questions and have your say.](#)
- A series of Community Drop-In Events will include displays with information and you will be able to talk to members of the Partnership, as well as representatives from the Government, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the British Geological Survey. There will be short presentations from the specialists and small discussion groups.
- The dates and venues for these events are as follows:

Friday 19 th November	Millom - Network Centre	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Saturday 20 th November	Barrow - The Forum	Drop in 10am - 4pm (Sat)
Monday 22 nd November	Carlisle - Old Town Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Tuesday 23 rd November	Whitehaven - Civic Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Wednesday 24 th November	Keswick - Crosthwaite Church Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Thursday 26 th November	Wigton - Market Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Friday 26 th November	Calderbridge - Village Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Monday 29 th November	Penrith - Methodist Church Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Tuesday 30 th November	Kendal - Town Hall	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm
Friday 3 rd December	Workington - St Michael's Church	Drop in 12 midday - 8pm

- The Partnership is also producing a pack of materials to enable members of the public to find out more and feed their views into the process. This 'discussion pack' includes a DVD and a booklet with some background information and questions. The pack is designed to help small groups of up to 10 to have a discussion for around two hours, and then give their views on some of the key issues such as potential impacts, community benefits and community involvement in decision making.

The packs will be available from early November. You can request any number of packs to be sent to you by emailing your name and address to helenf@3kq.co.uk or phoning 0800 048 8912 extension 1.

- A newsletter will be distributed to all homes across Copeland and Allerdale in November, and there will also be information in the media and other publications, as well as in places like local libraries.

Partnership meetings

- The September meeting of the Partnership was cancelled pending Government confirmation of funding. The last Partnership meeting was at the Copeland Centre in Whitehaven on 5th August 2010. The main issues considered were: the types of waste that might go into a geological disposal facility, and what would constitute credible support from local communities if there was a decision to participate further in this process.

[Reports of Partnership meetings](#) are available on the Partnership website.

- The Partnership meets every six weeks. Members of the public are welcome to attend as observers and are also given an opportunity to ask questions. We would be grateful if anyone who is planning to attend could contact sharon.walker@copeland.gov.uk to let her know so that we can ensure that enough seating is made available. The next scheduled meetings are:

28th October 2010
Greenhill Hotel, Wigton. 0900 arrivals, 0930-1600

10th December 2010
The Copeland Centre, Whitehaven. 0900 arrivals, 0930-1600

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. What will the study by the British Geological Survey involve?

A. Before a community can make a decision about whether or not to participate in the process of finding a site for an underground geological disposal facility, the Government requires the area to be screened to take out areas that are clearly geologically unsuitable. There is obviously no point any community spending too much time considering this issue, if there are no areas where the facility could be built.

Therefore the British Geological Survey (BGS) was asked to look at the information that is already available about the geology of the whole of Allerdale and Copeland, and screen out any areas that clearly have unsuitable geology for a disposal facility.

The Government's MRWS White Paper set out what geological criteria should be used for this screening.

The screening has been led by the BGS Chief Geologist and carried out by a team of experienced geoscientists. It is a 'desk based study' only. This means that it only uses readily available information. It is not 'in depth' and there is no consideration of non-geological factors.

This work will not provide any indication where a facility might eventually be located. It is simply intended to avoid unnecessary work in areas which are clearly unsuitable on geological grounds.

It is also important to be aware that this work will only identify areas which are unsuitable for an underground facility. It does not affect where the surface facility could be located. The surface facility could be a number of miles from the underground facility and could therefore be located in an area that is found to be unsuitable for the underground facility.

More rigorous assessment of a wide range of criteria will only be undertaken if West Cumbria then makes a 'decision to participate' further in the Government siting process.

Q. Will the BGS study show potential sites for a geological disposal facility?

A. This work will not provide any indication where a facility might eventually be located. At this stage the Partnership is only looking at whether we are in principle prepared to consider hosting a geological disposal facility somewhere in West Cumbria.

The study by the British Geological Survey will simply identify how much of the area is unsuitable for hosting an underground facility. Clearly, there is no point any community spending too much time considering this issue if there are no areas where the facility could be built. Since the work of the Partnership is funded by the Government they would also not want us to continue looking at these issues if there is nowhere in the area that would be suitable.

A key role of the Partnership is to represent the views of people living in or near West Cumbria in these discussions with Government. If you want to [get involved](#) then visit the Partnership website for details or call us on 0800 048 8912.

Thank you.

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