

Managing Radioactive Waste Safely:

The Position in West Cumbria



westcumbria:mrws

This leaflet has been produced by the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership.
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Introduction

Last year the UK Government launched a search for an engineered, underground site that will be the final home for our higher activity radioactive wastes. The Government is inviting communities across the country to talk to them about potentially hosting this site that will ultimately be called the 'Geological Disposal Facility'.

This approach was set out in the "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS): A Framework for Geological Disposal" White Paper.

In this, the Government said three things:

- **it doesn't want to force** the facility upon a community: it is looking for volunteers.
- **just talking** to Government about having this site does not **commit** anyone to it.
- **it will be a long time** until any construction starts, and during that time participating communities will have the right to withdraw from the process.

This leaflet explains how this is affecting us in West Cumbria.

Why are you receiving this leaflet?

Because you live in or near Allerdale and Copeland.

About seventy percent of the country's nuclear waste is already at Sellafield, and because of this, Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council have started talking to Government about the search for a site.

This is because wherever a site is chosen, the waste will have to be transported from Sellafield and is likely to affect us: we should therefore be involved from the start. At this stage we have only committed to *talking* to Government: we can withdraw at any time.

We want you to know what we are doing and what work we want to do before deciding whether to move to the next stage.

This leaflet is just one of the ways you can find out about this, you can also visit our website, www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk or look out for information in Allerdale Outlook, Copeland Matters and Your Cumbria magazines in the future. You can even come and observe our meetings to see what we're talking about – contact details are on the back page.

Who is having these discussions with Government?

To ensure a wide range of community interests are involved in discussions, a joint partnership has been set up.

This is called the "West Cumbria MRWS Partnership" and aims to make recommendations to the councils on whether they should move to the next stage of the process with the Government. The Partnership itself is not taking any decisions. Its role is an advisory one of fact-finding and research gathering.

The Partnership is currently made up of Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council along with Barrow Borough Council, Eden District Council, South Lakeland District Council, the Lake District National Park Authority, the Cumbria Association of Local Councils, NuLeAF (the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum), local trade unions, the National Farmers' Union (NFU), Chamber of Commerce, the West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group, and the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership.

Other organisations attend as 'observing members' including Government departments, the Isle of Man Government, CoRWM (Committee on Radioactive Waste Management), the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the safety and environment regulators.

The Partnership meets roughly every six weeks. The public can attend these meetings to observe discussions and ask questions.

The Government is providing funding to cover the costs of the work the Partnership needs to do before it can make a recommendation on whether to move to the next stage of the process or not.



What's going to happen next?

Geological Screening

The British Geological Survey (BGS) will 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 the disposal facility, as outlined in the MRWS White Paper. This screening work is likely to be undertaken within the next 12 months.

Field investigations, where necessary, would only come later.

Consultation

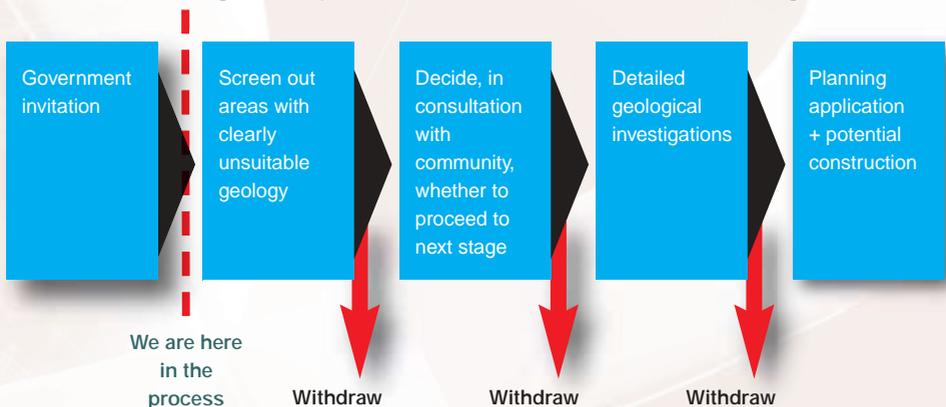
We know that nuclear waste is a sensitive issue with a varied history in West Cumbria. The Partnership therefore intends to run a process of

communications and consultation to give you an opportunity to:

- Find out more about the process.
- Ask questions on the process.
- Give your views on whether we should move to the next stage of investigations.

This work could take a number of forms, including articles in Allerdale Outlook, Copeland Matters, Your Cumbria and the local press, information/surveys on the Partnership website, meetings of parish councils etc and a formal consultation or survey. Our website will always contain the most up-to-date information on how to find out more and have your say.

The diagram below shows the process for finding a geological disposal facility. The whole process (to reach a point where the site is ready to accept waste) could take two to three decades. We can withdraw at any point until underground operations and construction are due to begin.



The following information is based upon the MRWS White Paper and information provided from Government departments.

What is a geological disposal facility?

Geological disposal involves putting radioactive waste deep inside a suitable rock formation to ensure that no harmful quantities of radioactivity ever reach the surface.

Waste would be placed in an engineered underground facility, which would use natural barriers (the geology) and man-made barriers (the waste containers and materials placed around the containers) to contain the radioactivity.

Government has said that building a geological disposal facility is their preferred approach to managing higher activity radioactive waste. This is supported by the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Geological Society, and was based on recommendations from CoRWM.

It is the approach being implemented by most countries with higher activity radioactive waste.

What would a geological disposal facility look like?

The actual design of a facility would be developed as the Government Managing Radioactive Waste Safely

(MRWS) programme moves forward. However it is likely that:

- The facility would have buildings above the ground (for example, for facilities such as workshops and admin offices) as well as the underground vaults.
- The underground vaults and tunnels would probably be excavated at a depth somewhere between 200 and 1000 metres (depending on the geology of the site).
- The facility would probably extend underground over an area of several square kilometres.

What waste would be put into a geological disposal facility?

There are different levels of radioactive waste. In this search the Government is aiming to find a geological disposal facility for the country's *higher activity waste*, which includes higher level waste, intermediate level waste, and a small fraction of low level waste. Some of this waste already exists, and some will come from the operation and decommissioning of existing nuclear facilities.

The facility could potentially also take waste from any new nuclear power stations that are to be developed and any nuclear materials that are declared waste in the future.

What are the timescales for the development of a facility?

The process to find, construct and begin operation of a geological disposal facility is a long one, which will be driven by discussions with local communities, as well as rigorous technical investigations of potential sites. No one can be exact, but it is likely to be around two to three decades from the beginning of the site selection process to when a facility can receive the first waste, wherever it is in the UK.

Is safety being addressed?

Safety is the overriding issue in this process. Local communities, planning authorities and environment and safety regulators will need to have their safety concerns sufficiently addressed long before any geological disposal facility could start being built.



What are the potential benefits and negative impacts of hosting a facility?

It is too early to say exactly what benefits or negative impacts there might be for the community that hosts the geological disposal facility. However, some might include:

Potential benefits:

- Jobs from construction work.
- Jobs during site operation.
- Investment from Government for long term improvements in the area.

Potential negative impacts:

- The impact of construction on the community and its transportation links.
- Concerns about the safety of a facility.
- A negative perception of the area hosting the facility.

One of the roles of the local councils and the Partnership is to look into these potential benefits and negative impacts with Government, before a decision is taken to move to the next stage or not.

*For more information please visit www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk
contact us via email to contact@westcumbriamrws.org.uk
or by calling our freephone number 0800 048 8912.*