

Small Users Liaison Group

Environment Agency - Policy Update Paper

June 2006

Surplus Source Disposal Programme (SSDP)

Steady progress has been made in arranging removal and disposal of surplus sources throughout the UK, with ~£3 million in subsidy offers made to end-March 2006. Despite some delays in agreeing contracts, and operational problems with the B13 source handling facility at Windscale, recent progress is encouraging. New work for the remainder of the programme during FY 2006/07 will focus on removal of surplus sources from schools, colleges & museums.

Radioactively contaminated land

Defra is planning for the new regulatory regime for radioactively contaminated land to come into force in August 2006 in England. Initially, the regime is likely to exclude the impact of contamination that has originated from nuclear licensed sites. The exclusion is due to a perceived conflict between the regime and the requirements of the Paris Convention on third party liability. We understand the Government's view is that there will need to be legislation introduced to apply to such off-site contamination in order fully to transpose the Basic Safety Standards (BSS) Directive. Discussions are underway on the form of this further phase of legislation.

Radioactive Substances Act 1993 Charges - 2006/07

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has approved our Environment Protection and Water Abstraction regulatory charges for 2006/07. For RSA93, the charges are the same as those in our consultative proposals highlighted to SULG in November 2005. A consultation report will be published on the Environment Agency's website.

LLW Policy Consultation.

The closing date for the consultation was 31st May. Defra have had over 100 responses which they are analysing. As they are only about half way through this task, they are not yet in a position to provide SULG with a summary of what people are saying about each of the issues raised. Neither are they able to say what the implications of the consultation are for any changes to the draft policy contained within the consultation document.

Defra hope to be able to provide Ministers with their proposed final policy by the end of July, but will not be able to publish it until the early autumn, because of the Parliamentary summer recess. In the meantime, they have awarded a contract to Galson Sciences Ltd, to scope the feasibility of gathering data on LLW arisings from the non-nuclear industry, across all of the UK. This work is in support of the suggestion that Government policy should require regional and local planning authorities to consider non-nuclear disposal needs in their waste strategies - and in turn, these bodies will require the issue to be defined for them.

The contractor will liaise with SULG and to discuss with interested members, the most effective way that such data could be gathered. The report from this scoping project will set out the resources and time that full data collection may require. Galson's contact is likely to be David Bennett.

Radioactive Substances Regulation Environmental Principles

As mentioned at the last meeting, we are developing a suite of Radioactive Substances Regulation Environmental Principles (REPs). We have now secured resources to progress this work and are considering how best to take this forward. Our development of the REPs will be informed by the review of the Safety Assessment Principles (SAPs) that the NII is undertaking; we are represented on their editorial board.

Publication of North Wales Radioactivity Study

A Welsh Assembly Government study, "Sea to Land Transfer of Anthropogenic Radionuclides to the North Wales Coast", and an associated monitoring report commissioned by the Environment Agency, was published on 5 April 2006. The work has quantified the transfer of radionuclides on the North Wales coastline, and updated the previous assessment of radiation doses to the public on the North Wales coastline as a result of sea to land transfer. The outcome is that the assessed radiation doses to people are very low. There has been one unusual finding, i.e. elevated levels of technetium-99 in sediment samples at one location in the Menai Strait. This is interesting in terms of the environmental processes that could be responsible, but the radiological impact is extremely small.

Creating A Better Place

We published our new corporate strategy, 'Creating A Better Place', on 1 April 2006. This sets out our priorities and ambitions for the next five years (2006-2011). A copy of the document is available via our website.

Developing a Strategy for Radioactive Substances Regulation

We are developing a strategy for radioactive substances regulation - to consider how we contribute to each of the Themes and Roles that are set out in our corporate strategy, and to identify any forthcoming issues or challenges that may be relevant. So far we have drafted a document that sets out our vision for the future, describing the work we undertake and the 'big picture' as it applies to our work. We've also captured a number of aspirations that we wish to achieve under each of the environmental themes and roles. Further work will be necessary to properly prioritise the aspirations and to consider, through our business planning and implementation mechanisms, how best to achieve these. A presentation will be provided to a subsequent SULG meeting to describe the draft strategy, which we plan to share more widely in the future.

Draft Recommendations from the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management

On 27 April 2006 the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) announced an integrated package of draft recommendations for the long-term management of the UK's radioactive waste. These envisage that, in the long term, radioactive waste will be disposed by means of deep geological disposal and the need for robust interim storage until appropriate facilities for disposal are made available. The recommendations are now available for consultation prior to CoRWM delivering its final report to Defra and the devolved administrations in July 2006. Full details of the draft recommendations can be found at www.corwm.org.uk.

Low Level Waste Repository near Drigg Authorisation

Ministers have cleared our proposals for the revised RSA authorisation for the Low Level Waste Repository near Drigg. We have issued the authorisation and it is now effective. We have introduced a number of new requirements on the site operator, particularly to ensure that post-closure risks are optimised. A copy of our Decision Document is available via the Environment Agency's website.

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA)

NDA launched its first phase of competition with a 'Drigg Industry Day'. It will compete the contract for management of the Low Level Waste Repository site, plus work to develop a Low Level Waste (LLW) strategy for the UK. Together with other regulators we presented our expectations for significant improvements in LLW management. Invitations to Tender will be sent out in October 2006, and NDA plans to award a contract one year later.

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE)

COMARE will soon publish its 11th report on clustering of childhood cancers across the UK. Findings show no correlation between clustering & nuclear power station sites, but confirm clustering previously identified near certain non-power station nuclear sites (e.g. in Seascale, close to Sellafield). There is evidence that clustering is a general phenomenon across the UK, not due to chance, for which the reasons are not understood. The final draft report is with the Environment Agency's health specialists for consideration.

Bob Russ

Policy Manager
Radioactive Substances Regulation
Environment Agency