

NEWS RELEASE

PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES IS THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY ON LONG-TERM RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

11 April 2006

A meeting of the Local Government Association's Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum (NuLeAF) ¹ on 6 April agreed the principles that should guide Government in the implementation of policy on long-term radioactive waste management. These principles will now be subject to consultation with NuLeAF's member authorities.

NuLeAF agreed that a policy implementation process ² must be based on the principles of:

- willingness to participate on the part of local authorities in the areas of interest;
- right to withdraw on the part of those local authorities;
- partnership with local communities;
- community benefits packages;
- step-wise decision making; and
- the establishment of Government implementation agencies that engender trust and confidence.

The desired implementation process would give a central decision-making role to local authorities, particularly with regard to opting in or opting out of the process.

NuLeAF believes that there is a case for developing an implementation strategy based on these concepts in the light of:

- the hazardous and long-lived nature of radioactive wastes;
- the decades of failure to implement a long-term management policy;
- the potentially large financial costs of future failure;
- international experience of progress in implementing policy; and
- widespread support from UK stakeholders for such an approach.

NuLeAF recognises that there are challenges to be overcome in the practical application of these concepts in the UK setting. It believes that work to address these challenges should now be given priority.

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Notes

- 1 NuLeAF was established by agreement of Local Government Association Group Leaders in November 2003. It has the support of 91 Local Authorities, 3 National Park Authorities and 1 Fire Service – giving a total of 95 bodies. Many of these authorities host nuclear sites, some are neighbouring authorities concerned about local economic, safety and environmental impacts of future legacy management, others are more widely dispersed and affected, for example, by nuclear transportation or historic (and potentially future) nuclear facility siting issues. All have decided to co-operate in the collective community interest on radioactive waste and nuclear legacy issues.

NuLeAF's goals are to: provide a mechanism to identify a common, local government viewpoint on nuclear clean-up issues; act as an interface with Government and regulatory bodies as they consult on waste management and clean-up policy and practice; and influence government policy in the interests of the communities affected.

2. The broad principles were identified following an extensive review of international best practice in radioactive waste management and best practice in other industrial sectors within the UK. The review was conducted on behalf of NuLeAF by Enviros Consulting and the summary and conclusions of their report is appended.

Summary and Conclusions from ‘The Implementation of a National Radioactive Waste Management Programme in the UK: Implications for Local Communities and Local Authorities’, Enviros, March 2006 [Draft]

The Government is expected to propose new policies for the management of radioactive wastes sometime in 2006 or 2007, following receipt of CoRWM’s recommendations on management options and strategies. Irrespective of what Government decides, it is evident that one or more new waste management facilities (e.g. a store or a repository) will need to be built in the UK.

The UK has not been very successful in implementing radioactive waste management or disposal programmes in the past. Whatever is planned to be done in the future must learn the lessons from Nirex’s previous failed siting attempts, and from the experience of radioactive waste management abroad and from other industries.

A review of international experience shows that most successful siting programmes (e.g. those that are moving towards identifying a preferred site) are embracing step-wise processes that involve volunteerism and community benefits as a way of moving forward. There is, however, no universal solution to simplify the process and no country is finding it ‘easy’ to site a radioactive waste management facility.

On the basis of the review, we have developed a step-wise model implementation process that recognises the plain reality that few non-nuclear communities are likely to choose to volunteer to host a waste management facility, even with various incentives and benefits on offer and, therefore, the onus to host a facility is likely to fall most heavily on the communities around existing nuclear sites.

This model implementation process is characterised by a number of key elements:

- It would be led by an independent implementing organisation that has the overall responsibility to move the process forward and take the lead on the siting decisions. This organisation could be constituted in a number of ways (e.g. commission led, implementing agency led or contract based). There are advantages and disadvantages with each model and Government must think carefully about which is most likely to bring about an organisation that can command the trust and confidence of the stakeholders, in particular the local communities and the local authorities.
- Volunteers would be sought from local authorities around existing nuclear sites that meet a set of high-level site screening criteria that would be agreed through a process of public consultation. Non-nuclear communities would not be excluded from the process and would be invited to volunteer, but there would not be an extended process to encourage them to do so.
- Financial support would be made available to communities and local authorities to enable them to participate in the siting process. This would ensure that they did not incur any costs from participating.
- The local authority (or authorities in two tier areas) at each volunteer community would have the power to volunteer and to veto decisions (jointly in respect of two tier areas). They would be advised by a local working group that would comprise representatives of the local authority/authorities, local community groups and other interested local parties. The working group would be funded by the implementing organisation to undertake independent peer review of the process to ensure the local community is fully informed about the process and of the likely advantages and disadvantages that might arise from hosting a facility.
- A partnership arrangement would be fostered between the implementing organisation and the local authority. This may develop to the point of the setting up of a local company jointly owned between the implementing organisation and the local authority at the site finally chosen to host the facility. This joint company would ensure that the development and operation of the facility takes full account of the local circumstances, and the community benefits from the development in the short and long-term.

- The final host community would be able to negotiate a package of benefits to compensate for real or perceived impacts to the area. The benefit package could include such things as infrastructure developments and inward investment but is also likely to include a capital fund or endowment to ensure the sustainability of the community in the long-term.
- A streamlined and transparent decision making process would need to be introduced that would encompass all of the formal determinations that would need to be made by the regulators as well as the public consultation processes. The SEA/SA and EIA processes provide a framework for this.
- Various new organisations will need to be established and changes made to existing procedures to support this process. Certain of these changes can be brought about by Government making Directions to established bodies and issuing new statutory guidance. A single new Act that brings together and spells out the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the process would, however, help to engender trust and confidence in the process, particularly given the long time-scales involved.

We recommend this model implementation process to the local authorities because it brings with it the opportunity to influence the decision-making process and to receive benefits for the host community. This model process also has advantages for the nation as a whole because it reduces (but does not eliminate) the risk of failure of reaching a successful end-point to the siting process because it maintains widespread stakeholder participation throughout whilst, at the same time, recognising the political reality that an unconstrained process (both in terms of time and money) are unlikely to be supported by Government.

A key issue remains whether or not any community would wish to volunteer to host a waste management facility. Given the likelihood that the existing nuclear communities will, at some point, be approached to do so, it is recommended that the various levels of local Government (e.g. district and county) begin internal discussion to consider what level a community might be most appropriate to volunteer (this may be location specific due to demographic considerations) and what type of benefits might be considered to provide appropriate compensation.

When thinking through these issues, Government, local communities and local authorities around the existing nuclear facilities should consider the implications of no community volunteering in a future siting process. If this were to happen then the status quo would be maintained and those communities that currently host waste would continue to do so without any measures to mitigate real or perceived impacts. This would not appear to be a satisfactory state of affairs, given Government's commitment to partnership and local participation.