

Radioactive Substances Regulation

The Environment Agency is the principal regulator in England and Wales under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 [RSA93]. This Act is concerned with the keeping, use and disposal of radioactive substances and in particular, the regulation of radioactive waste. This duty involves assessing, authorising, inspecting and enforcing under the relevant legislation.

Assessing the Hazards

Radioactive substances are present in the environment as a result both of natural processes and of man's technological developments. The Environment Agency's objective is to regulate the controlled and cautious use of radioactive substances so as to protect the environment. The Agency's role is to combine an understanding of the hazards and their associated consequences with a detailed knowledge of how they can be eliminated or controlled and managed and to apply this expertise to each situation which it regulates.

Permissions

The RSA93 requires persons whose activities involve radioactive substances to apply for permission, which takes the form of:

- a certificate of authorisation for the accumulation and disposal of radioactive waste, e.g. from hospitals, research organisations; and/or,
- a certificate of registration for keeping and using radioactive materials, e.g. industrial process flow measurement equipment, density gauges.

The Agency assesses proposals to keep and use radioactive substances and to accumulate and dispose of radioactive waste. If, having assessed the proposals, the Agency is satisfied that the applicant will comply with the requirements of RSA93, it may issue the appropriate permission. These permissions incorporate limits on the types and quantities of radioactive materials and numerous conditions to protect the environment. The Agency also carries out assessments of the potential combined effects where several radioactive disposals may occur in the same vicinity e.g. in the Cambridge area.

Nuclear licensed sites, such as power stations and fuel processing plants also require permissions, through different arrangements of licensing under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965.



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Regulation of the Nuclear Industry

In England and Wales, the disposal of radioactive wastes from licensed nuclear sites, which include nuclear power stations and sites where fuel fabrication or reprocessing takes place, is regulated by the Agency. The Agency works closely with Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate [HMNI], which is primarily responsible for safety issues, to ensure that the regulatory activities at these sites are consistent, coordinated and comprehensive.

Nuclear power stations in the Environment Agency Anglian Region include Sizewell A & B and Bradwell.

The Agency reviews the RSA93 authorisations for all Nuclear Licensed Sites regularly. Where such reviews suggest that it would be appropriate to revise limits or conditions, draft revised Certificates of Authorisation, supported by explanatory memoranda, are made widely available as part of extensive consultations with the public. Comments received from this consultation are taken into account in finalising the Certificates of Authorisation.

Radiological Protection Principles

In carrying out assessments of operators' proposals to dispose of radioactive wastes to the environment, the Agency applies HM Government's policy on radiological protection principles:

- All practices giving rise to radioactive waste must be justified, in terms of their overall benefit.
- Radiation exposure of individuals and the collective dose of the population arising from radioactive wastes shall be reduced to levels which are as low as reasonably achievable, economic and social factors being taken into account.
- The exposure of individuals from all sources, excluding natural background radiation and medical procedures, should be below specified dose limits.

In many cases, extensive information is needed to justify proposals to generate and release given quantities of waste by particular routes. In such cases, which will include almost all developments at Nuclear Licensed Sites, comprehensive details of equipment, control techniques and management arrangements will need to be given.


Waste Disposal Records and Environmental Monitoring

The Environment Agency requires the operator to keep detailed records of waste disposals. Some operators, particularly licensed nuclear sites, are required to conduct environmental monitoring surveys for radioactivity. The Agency also commissions independent monitoring to ensure that operators results are valid.

Compliance and Enforcement

The Agency assesses an operator's compliance with the terms and conditions of a permission by a combination of on-site inspection of the operator's premises and by scrutiny of records and other documents supplied by the operator in compliance with the requirements of the permission. Breaches of some conditions, which of themselves are only of minor concern, are often rectified by discussion during inspections. Failure by an operator to comply with the terms and conditions of a permission may result in the serving by the Agency of an Enforcement Notice or prosecution or both. In cases where there is an imminent risk of serious pollution of the environment, the Agency will serve a Prohibition Notice.

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Due Date
17 MAY 2007



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