

AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR FORUM

Management of Low and Intermediate Radwastes

Policy

- a. The ANF supports Federal Government's initiative to establish the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility for low-level and intermediate-level radioactive wastes.
- b. The ANF encourages the states and territories to use the planned federal government facility, or establish waste facilities conforming to the same standards.

(Adopted 21/12/05)

Summary and Conclusions

The above policy is based on the practicalities of the situation surrounding radioactive waste management in Australia in December 2005 and recognises the need for proper and uniform waste management practices to be established, monitored, and maintained. The Federal Government has passed legislation for the establishment of the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility to be located in the Northern Territory and is planning to have this facility on line by 2011. Such a facility is needed for proper storage of wastes from ANSTO and other commonwealth run operations. Meanwhile individual states and territories store their radioactive wastes (primarily of medical origin) in some 100 locations that may not meet or exceed the new requirements. The ANF believes this is not a satisfactory situation.

Consideratiuons

1. The Present Situation

Currently, the governments of each state and territory in Australia are responsible for regulating and controlling the use within their boundaries of radioactive substances, including wastes arising there from. With the possible exception of Western Australia, however, no state or territory has yet constructed fully dedicated facilities for the ultimate disposal or storage of radioactive LLW and SLILW. These wastes remain the responsibility of the users and are in temporary storage in well over 100 locations throughout Australia.

Federal agencies such as the NHMRC and ARPANSA have developed (i.e. 1992) or are developing (i.e. 2006) codes of practice designed to improve the conditions under which radwaste is managed. However, since the states operate according to their own statutes it is likely that the existence of these codes will not, by themselves, lead all of the states and territories to agree to revise their practices, if necessary, to meet or exceed these requirements

Lack of an agreed approach to the responsible management of nuclear wastes means that a higher likelihood of mismanagement will continue, which could have adverse public health consequences. Also, the absence of adequate storage facilities can, in the long run, only serve to inhibit the beneficial use of nuclear applications in this country.

Note: LLW = Low Level Waste; SLILW = Short Lived Intermediate Level Waste (i.e. half lives <30y); LLILW = Long Lived Intermediate Level Waste (i.e. half lives >30y) as defined by the IAEA

2. The Federal Initiative

In 2004 the then Federal Government proposal to establish a National Radioactive Waste Repository in the Woomera region Of South Australia was lost in political infighting between the state and the Federal Government in the lead-up to the federal elections. Subsequently in July 2004 the Federal Government announced that it would develop its own facility and leave

the states to look after their own wastes as at present. The newly proposed federal facility is called the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility, its enabling legislation was passed in December 2005, and it is now scheduled to begin operations in 2011.

ANF support for the Federal Government's initiative is based on the following:

- no equivalent centralised facilities currently exist in Australia,
- a national facility is needed for the wastes arising from Commonwealth establishments, particularly those from ANSTO,
- Commonwealth run waste facilities will be needed to meet ARPANSA's requirement that proper waste facilities must be available if operating licences are to be issued and/or renewed for Australia's nuclear reactors,
- The proposed management procedures will be consistent with best international practice,
- establishment of the facility will put waste handling on a proper management basis,
- operation of the facility could help improve the public image of waste management and of the nuclear industry generally, and could lead to greater public acceptance of the LLILW store concept,

3. State and Territory Responses

The ANF believes that it is important that this country's low level and intermediate level wastes be managed responsibly and in accordance with nationally accepted codes of practice. These requirements are now being completed and the states and territories should plan to bring their management practices into compliance as soon as practicable.

The best way of achieving this would seem to be for the states to place their wastes in the CRWMF facility when it is completed. The planned CRWMF should be able to accommodate these wastes since they would necessitate only a minor increase in the design capacities of the facility.

Alternatively the states and territories could establish new or upgrade existing facilities (if required) although this would seem to be a more expensive and less safe solution from the national perspective.

4. References

1. Holland, I. "Radioactive Waste and Spent Nuclear Fuel Management in Australia", Australian Parliamentary Library 18/8/03.
2. "Radioactive Waste Management in Australia", ARPANSA, 8/10/2004.
3. "The Classification of Radioactive Waste": Safety Series No. 111-G-1.1, International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, 1994
4. "Code of Practice for Near Surface Disposal of Radioactive Waste in Australia", Radiation Health Series No.35, National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), 1992.
5. "Code of Practice and Safety Guide for the Pre-disposal Management of Radioactive Waste", ARPANSA, to be published in 2006.
6. "Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility Factsheets ", Department of Education Science and Training website www.radioactivewaste.gov.au