



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Nuclear waste: Commission welcomes adoption of radioactive waste directive

Brussels, 19 July 2011 - Will the EU have binding standards for managing radioactive waste in the EU? Including final repositories for nuclear waste from nuclear power plants? Will Member States have to notify detailed programmes on when and how they will build these repositories? The answer to all these questions is: Yes. Today, the Council has adopted the "radioactive waste and spent fuel management directive", proposed by the Commission on 3rd November 2010. With this adoption, the Directive will enter into force at the latest in September this year, and Member States have to submit the first national programmes in 2015.

"This is a major achievement for nuclear safety in the EU" said Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger. "After years of inaction, the EU for the very first time commits itself to a final disposal of nuclear waste. With this directive, the EU becomes the most advanced region for the safe management of radioactive waste and spent fuel."

Background:

All EU Member States produce radioactive waste, generated by numerous activities, such as electricity production, medicine, research, industry and agriculture. 14 out of 27 Member States have nuclear reactors which generate also spent fuel.

While reaffirming the ultimate responsibility of Member States for the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste, the Directive adopted today creates a strong EU framework with important obligations imposed on Member States.

In particular:

- Member States will have to draw up national programmes and notify them to the Commission by 2015 at the latest. The Commission will examine them and can require changes. National programmes have to include plans with a concrete timetable for the construction of disposal facilities, as well as a description of the activities needed for the implementation of disposal solutions, costs assessments and a description of the financing schemes. They will have to be updated regularly.
- Safety standards drawn up by the International Atomic Energy Agency become legally binding.
- Information shall be made available to the general public and workers. The public shall also be given the opportunities to participate effectively in the decision-making process.

Moreover, Member States are required to invite periodically international peer reviews to exchange experience and ensure the application of the highest standards. This shall be done at least every 10 years.

Finally, two or more Member States can agree to use a disposal facility in one of them.

Exports to countries outside the EU is allowed under very strict and binding conditions: The third country needs to have a final repository in operation, when the waste is being shipped. Such a repository for highly radioactive waste is internationally defined to be a deep geological repository. At present, such deep geological repositories do not exist anywhere in the world nor is a repository in construction outside of the EU. It takes currently a minimum of 40 years to develop and build one.

According to already existing EU Directives on the shipment of spent fuels and radioactive waste, the export to African, Pacific and Caribbean Countries as well to Antarctica is already explicitly ruled out.

In its initial directive proposal, the Commission's had advocated a complete export ban in the new directive. On 23 June 2011, the European Parliament in its plenary session voted in favour of a complete export ban as proposed by the Commission. As the legal basis for this directive is the Euratom Treaty, the European Parliament is only consulted, the opinion is therefore not binding. The final decision is taken only by the Council.

The Commission will closely and carefully monitor the implementation of the new Directive, in particular progress made in building disposal facilities for radioactive waste and spent fuel and, if they occur at a later stage, possible exports of radioactive material.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/waste_management/waste_management_en.htm

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