

Brussels, 3 November 2010

## **Nuclear waste: Commission proposes safety standards for final disposal**

***The Commission today proposed safety standards for disposing spent fuel and radioactive waste from nuclear power plants as well as from medicine or research. In the Directive put forward today, Member States are asked to present national programmes, indicating when, where and how they will construct and manage final repositories aimed at guaranteeing the highest safety standards. With the Directive internationally agreed safety standards become legally binding and enforceable in the European Union.***

Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger said: "Safety concerns all citizens and all EU countries, whether they are in favour or against nuclear energy. We have to make sure that we have the highest safety standards in the world to protect our citizen, our water and the ground against nuclear contamination. Safety is indivisible. If an accident happens in one country, it can have devastating effects also in others."

The Commission proposes to set up an EU legally binding and enforceable framework to ensure that all Member States will apply the common standards developed in the context of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for all stages of spent fuel and radioactive waste management up to final disposal.

In particular the Directive establishes that:

- Member States have to draw up national programmes within four years of the adoption of the Directive. These should include: plans for the construction and the management of disposal facilities, laying down a concrete time table for the construction, with milestones and the description of all the activities that are needed to implement the disposal solutions, costs assessments and the financing schemes chosen.
- National programmes have to be notified. The Commission may ask Member States to modify their plans.
- Two or more Member States can agree to use a final repository in one of them. It is not allowed to export nuclear waste to countries outside the EU for final disposal.
- The public must be informed by Member States and should be able to participate in the decision making on nuclear waste management.
- Safety standards drawn up by the International Atomic Energy Agency become legally binding. This includes an independent authorities which grants licences for building repositories and checks the safety analysis for each individual repository.

**Background:**

More than 50 years after the first nuclear power reactor became operational (1956 Calder Hall, UK) there are still no final repositories. Year by year, 7 000 cubic meters of high level waste are typically produced in the EU, with the majority of the material being stored in interim storages. High level waste is the part of reprocessed spent fuel which cannot be re-used and has therefore to be disposed forever.

While these interim storages are necessary for fuel elements and high level waste to reduce temperatures and to decrease radiation levels, they are no long term solution as they need continuous maintenance and oversight. As they are typically close or on the surface, there is in addition a risk of accidents, including airplane crashes, fires or earth quakes. There is a broad consensus among scientists and international organizations such as the IAEA that deep geological disposal is the most appropriate solution for long-term disposal of high level nuclear waste.

Under the Euratom Treaty, the EU has the legal competence to protect the general public from ionizing radiation. The energy mix is a national competence. Out of 27 Member States, 14 Member States have nuclear power plants.

**Further information:**

For more information please see also [MEMO/10/540](#).

The proposal for a Council Directive on the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste is available on:

[http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/waste\\_management/waste\\_management\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/waste_management/waste_management_en.htm)

The IAEA safety standards:

[http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/Pub1273\\_web.pdf](http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/Pub1273_web.pdf)

A related International Convention is available on:

<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/1997/infcirc546.pdf>