

# **Latest developments in the UK**

Presentation to the Topseal  
conference, 17 September 2006

**nirex**

# Nirex's Mission

*“ In support of Government policy, develop and advise on safe, environmentally sound and publicly acceptable options for the long-term management of radioactive materials in the UK*

# Nirex's Objectives

- (a) Carry out scientific, engineering and social science research to help develop safe and environmentally sound options for dealing with radioactive waste in the long term;
- (b) Set specifications and standards based on a phased deep geological disposal concept and advise the industry on how to treat and package radioactive waste through the application of the Nirex Letter of Compliance Process;
- (c) Maintain an inventory of radioactive waste in the UK in conjunction with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra);
- (d) Communicate with all stakeholders, including the public, to build understanding and develop ways of addressing the wide range of concerns and views surrounding the management of radioactive waste, so that these influence our work.

*This work will be carried out adhering to Government policy at all times, ensuring no conflict or overlap with the work of Committee on Radioactive Waste Management or the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority”*

**nirex**

# History of failure to find or hold a site

- 1970's
  - Geological disposal of High Level Waste
- 1980's
  - Sea disposal of Intermediate Level Waste
  - (Nirex formed in 1982)
  - Geological disposal of Short Lived Intermediate Level Waste
  - 1987 Nirex began new search for deep repository
  - 1989 Sellafield and Dounreay selected
- 1990's
  - 1991 Concentrate on Sellafield
  - 1997 Investigations “wound up” following refusal of RCF planning permission by Secretary of State

# Ongoing dialogue

- ***Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Consultation (MRWS)***
  - ***Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)***
  - ***Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum (NuLeAF)***
- Local Communities and Local Government
- Our own staff
- Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace
- Trade Unions
- International 'sisters'
- Politicians and Media
- Regulators
- Nuclear Free Local Authorities
- Defra/DA - MOD - DTI - No 10 (UK Government)
- Nuclear Industry
- Radioactive Waste Policy Group (RWPG)

# Lessons

## Structure:

- needs to give issues visibility - Nirex independence from waste producers and Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
- Public interest at heart of long-term management
- Broad societal involvement
- Partnership with any host community will be key

# Nirex independence

- New Board
- Nirex independent of industry, and
- under greater Government control
- Shares transferred to a new Company Limited by Guarantee (Defra & DTI)
- Funding mainly through NDA, but
- Nirex separate from and independent of NDA
- Longer-term future/structure to be determined in light of CoRWM's recommendations

# Lessons

## Process:

Must be open, transparent and accountable:

- Clear decision points over long-term waste management options
- Clarify up-front over how these decisions are taken
- Review all technical options
- Stakeholder consultation and involvement
- Open and legitimate site selection process



# Government review

## Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) Programme

- CoRWM Options Review 2003-06
- Final report, July 2006
  - interim storage
  - geological disposal
- Government decision on option(s) December 2006 ?
- Site selection criteria and process 2007 ?
- Implementation 2008 onwards ?
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive

# Lessons

## Process:

- SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), excellent framework:
  - stakeholders to be engaged
  - scientific and technical work to be defined and communicated
  - scientific and social research to be integrated into decision making
  - stakeholder involvement in decision making process
- Partnership with community is key
  - based on equality

# Lessons

## Process:

- Open and legitimate site selection process
- Siting criteria – how to choose a site
  - agree upfront
  - involve all stakeholders
- Relationship between UK plc and potential host communities
  - recognise that a “contract” exists
  - address ethics of planning gain, regional development
  - veto for local communities?

# Lessons

## Behaviour:

- Change behaviour - informed and responsive, not elite arrogant specialist:
  - work at stakeholders' speed
  - listen to people who have an interest
  - involvement not information
  - add 'preview' to review
  - Independent Transparency Review Panel
    - now covering all aspects of transparency
- Retrievability
- Partnership with community

# Issues surrounding legitimacy in UK radioactive waste management

- History of opposition
  - birth in war – the bomb
  - fear of catastrophe
    - Windscale fire (October 1957)
    - Three Mile Island (March 1979)
    - Chernobyl (April 1986)
- UK culture of secrecy
- Changing role of technical experts
  - science and society, cultural shift
    - scepticism (Thalidomide, BSE)
    - but who else to ask

# Is it possible to put in place a long-term solution?

Yes, if lessons put into practice:

- State the problem properly “the waste exists”
- Legitimacy is the key – not consensus
- Legitimacy:
  - equity – fairness
    - structure
    - process
    - behaviour
  - competence – the right science and technology
  - efficiency – proper use of resources, but safety paramount
- Transparency and accountability

# Concept Holder responsible for implementation

- “Controlling mind” – develops and controls concept specification
- Safety, environmental and financial risks to be managed
- Very long project – need to control interfaces and retain knowledge between many different stages
- Holistic procurement policy – skills vary
- Checks and balances needed

# Overall conclusion

- We believe this is an ethical issue - value driven
  - the waste exists
  - credible options allow this generation to deal with it
  - it should be dealt with
  - on behalf of the public
- Developing legitimacy is key to public acceptance