

Radioactive Substances

We regulate radioactive waste disposals to the environment. We do this through permits that contain limits and conditions aimed at minimising wastes and protecting the environment. We check for compliance with the permits by making regular inspections of AWE facilities.

During the year we will inspect facilities to ensure that the company complies with the conditions of the Environmental Permits issued to AWE for disposing of radioactive wastes and using some radioactive sources. Since the last LLC meeting in June we have conducted inspections on the Hydrodynamics facility, a review of the Radioactive Waste Management Arrangements (RWMA) and a Radioactive Waste Quality Checking activity. We conduct our inspections following a programme developed for the year. Our programme covers areas where we have specific regulatory interest, including operational and decommissioning facilities, as well as new facilities currently being developed at Aldermaston and Burghfield.

We work together with other regulators, such as the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR) whenever possible and particularly where there is an area of joint regulatory interest, such as the management and disposal of radioactive waste. We share information with other regulators to facilitate efficient regulation.

We produce assessment reports (Radioactive Substances Compliance Assessment Reports or RASCARs) for all our compliance work regulating radioactive substances, including checking discharge reports. These are available on our Public Register at our offices in Wallingford.

We have attended a range of regulatory interaction meetings with AWE covering current operations, development projects, waste management and decommissioning activities.

Radioactive waste quality checking activity.

We carried out a Waste Quality Checking activity. This work characterised wastes being produced from a range of facilities at AWE and we compared the results obtained by our contractors against AWE's waste monitoring, fingerprinting and sentencing results. This is the culmination of a long term project undertaken by AWE to improve its waste characterisation and sentencing procedures. Our contractor's report is being prepared.

Pangbourne Pipeline

We met with AWE to discuss the Pangbourne pipeline decommissioning. The pipeline presents a very low hazard to the public and is under surveillance to demonstrate it remains that way. Options for the management of the removal of the pipeline have been produced by AWE and trials on pipeline removal have been carried out on site. We support AWE's proposed activity to engage with stakeholders and landowners before decommissioning starts; this will allow the various options considered to be explained to the stakeholders and facilitate feedback. The MOD has no plan to require AWE to remove the pipeline in the near future; as the pipeline presents a low hazard. We are however pressing for detailed information on the options and a BAT assessment to support this.

Radioactive Waste Management Arrangements. (RWMA)

As part of the Environment Agency's (EA) Themed Inspection Programme, we conducted a series of interviews with the site director, senior managers and facility staff to assess compliance with those parts of the permit relevant to Radioactive Waste Management Arrangements (RWMAs). The inspections were assisted by the ONR and DNSR. The inspection focused on AWE's strategic planning for management of all wastes, and radioactive waste in particular, in an integrated way. We found the RWMA to be robust and we identified a number of areas of good practice. However, we issued a non-compliance for failure to comply with a general management condition of operating with sufficient competent persons to ensure compliance with the radioactive substances permits. We formed this view following a review of the environmental baseline document,

where key positions are required to ensure compliance with permit requirements. AWE has been without several baseline roles for some months, in particular some Facility Waste Officers, both Radioactive Waste Specialists and the Head of Environment role. AWE is taking steps to cover these baseline roles and appoint personnel where appropriate.

Other Environmental Permits

We permit other operations at AWE to protect the environment, including activities for generating power & steam, work using non-ferrous metals and the quality of surface water discharged from Aldermaston and Burghfield.

We had a meeting with AWE to discuss the next phase of installing further uninterruptable power supplies to a facility to allow safe and secure shut down of processes in the event of a national grid failure. This is part of the permitted combustion process and a permit variation will be required.

National Arrangements for Incidents involving Radioactivity (NAIR)

Radioactive materials are used for many purposes in industry, medicine and research and there are thousands of transport movements associated with these activities each year. Occasionally, things go wrong. NAIR was set up to protect the public from hazards arising from the use and transport of radioactive materials and in situations where no formal contingency plans exist. NAIR provides quick and widely available assistance to the police and other emergency services where no radiation expert is otherwise available. Assistance is provided from hospitals, the nuclear industry and government departments. AWE is part of the NAIR scheme and on 18th May AWE was contacted by the Police for advice. After appropriate safeguards AWE recovered the material and safely secured it until we could arrange for safe and secure disposal which we have now done.

Publications

There is a recent publication that may be of interest.

- The government has recently published a White Paper setting out the UK Government's framework for managing higher activity radioactive waste in the long term through geological disposal. This will be implemented alongside ongoing interim storage and supporting research.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/sy>

For more information contact:

Name **Andrew Pembroke**

Job Title **Nuclear Regulator**

E-mail **andrew.pembroke@environment-agency.gov.uk**