

## EU bids to lock down radioactive waste forever

November 3 2010, by Roddy Thomson



Interior view shows the storage room for highly radioactive waste in the interim storage site at the northern German city of Gorleben. Europe sought Wednesday to lock away forever lethal radioactive waste, but a European Commission warning of hopelessly inadequate disposal facilities itself drew a stinging rebuke.

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Half a century after atomic power was first produced in Britain, Europe's nuclear energy-producing countries stand accused of future negligence without a single "deep geological disposal" site equipped to withstand up to a million years of decay.

As a result, the European Union's executive arm has tabled legislative



proposals that would see states pushed to build the kind of facility deep in the earth's crust that it says scientists claim is the only way to protect nature's balance.

"We have to make sure that we have the highest safety standards in the world to protect our citizens, our water and the ground against nuclear contamination," said EU energy commissioner Guenther Oettinger.

"Safety is indivisible. If an accident happens in one country, it can have devastating effects also in others."

However, while environmental campaigners welcomed any move towards "increased transparency" under the planned changes, one attacked the commission's proposals as "sub-standard."

"It would take an engineering genius to safely bury white-hot, highlydangerous nuclear waste deep underground for longer than mankind has been on the planet," said Greenpeace EU dirty energy campaigner Jan Haverkamp in a report.

"We fear a disposal facility could rupture high-level nuclear waste into the water table for hundreds of thousands of years."

Within four years of Europe adopting the proposed legislation, the commission said states would have to nail down a "concrete timetable" for constructing their facilities, including "the financing schemes chosen."

The commission wants <u>nuclear power plant</u> operators "to put money aside for the financing of future disposals."

Producers would not be allowed to export nuclear waste to countries outside the EU for final disposal.



Current schemes offering so-called "interim storage" are given a lifespan of "maximal 50-100 years," the commission said, meaning waste "has to be retrieved and repackaged."

Spent fuel and <u>radioactive waste</u> "need continuous maintenance and oversight," it said.

As the material is typically near the surface, "there is in addition a risk of accidents, including airplane crashes, fires or earthquakes."

Finland plans to have the sort of repository the commission says the science recommends operational in 2020, Sweden in 2023 and France in 2025, Oettinger's office said.

The EU has 143 nuclear power plants in use across 14 of its 27 states, with another two, Italy and Poland, planning to build their first.

Countries would be able to choose to work together to build and manage final disposal sites in any one of them, should they secure cross-border public support.

Most European nations have settled on maintaining nuclear energy at the core of their power needs for coming generations, as oil threatens to run dry and new green technologies have yet to deliver their full potential.

The first nuclear plant to enter service in the EU was Calder Hall, which came on line in northwest England in 1956.

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Citation: EU bids to lock down radioactive waste forever (2010, November 3) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <u>https://phys.org/news/2010-11-eu-radioactive.html</u>



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