



# Summary Brief of Consultation on new Guidance on Requirements for Release of Nuclear Sites from Radioactive Substances Regulation

Natural Resources Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Environment Agency (the environment agencies) are the environmental regulators for Wales, Scotland and England respectively. Our responsibilities include regulating the disposal of radioactive waste on or from nuclear sites, so that the health of people and the integrity of the environment are protected. All disposals of radioactive waste must comply with conditions and limits set out in permits granted by the relevant environment agency.

Throughout Great Britain, many nuclear sites are being decommissioned and cleaned up. Eventually, an operator will wish to apply to the relevant environment agency for all, or part, of a site to be released from radioactive substances regulation. The environment agencies will only agree to release a nuclear site from our regulation if we are satisfied that radioactive waste disposal has ended and that the site is in a state that will ensure a satisfactory standard of protection for people and the environment.

Past operations at nuclear sites have produced large amounts of radioactive waste. Decommissioning will result in greater amounts, as facilities contaminated by radioactivity are dismantled and demolished. Buried structures, such as foundations, drains and pipes, if they are sufficiently contaminated, will become radioactive waste once they are no longer in use. Although areas of undisturbed ground or groundwater contaminated by radioactivity are not themselves radioactive waste, their clean-up may produce radioactive waste. In regulating radioactive waste disposal, the environment agencies are obliged, by international and domestic standards and law, to ensure that exposures of people to radiation are kept below certain limits and constraints.

Moreover, below these limits and constraints, exposures must be kept as low as reasonably achievable, taking account of economic and societal factors. This is referred to as optimisation, an essential principle in radiological protection. Optimisation should seek to keep the radiological exposure of people as low as possible, consistent with keeping the detriments (environmental, societal, economic, etc) of managing that exposure at acceptable levels.

This consideration of many factors means that a process of optimisation should ensure a suitably low level of risk from radiological exposure, but does not necessarily require the lowest possible risk. Applying optimisation to nuclear site decommissioning and clean-up should ensure that radioactive waste and contamination are managed in a way that is safe, but may not necessarily lead to all radioactivity being removed from a site.

Operators of different nuclear sites may therefore make different decisions about the amounts and types of radioactive waste or contamination they propose to remove from disposal for facilities elsewhere, or to leave on or adjacent to their site.

However, the primary objective must be the satisfactory protection of people and the environment. That is why the environment agencies have published this guidance document, to explain the principles, requirements and regulatory process we will apply to nuclear sites in all stages of decommissioning and clean-up. Our aim is to ensure that radioactive waste and contamination is managed in a way that is safe, and that strikes an appropriate balance between human health, environmental, societal, economic and other relevant factors, so that nuclear sites may eventually be released from regulation under radioactive substance legislation.

Part 1 of the guidance describes the environment agencies' principles for protection of people and the environment from radioactivity remaining on or adjacent to nuclear sites.

Part 2 of the guidance sets out the environment agencies' detailed requirements which, if met in full by an operator, will satisfy our principles.

Part 3 of the guidance describes how we expect an operator to implement our requirements over the lifetime of a site, and, ultimately, satisfy the relevant environment agency that a site can be released from radioactive substances regulation.