

Radioactive Waste

Figures for stocks of waste are only available from inventories for 1991, 1994, 1998, 2001 and 2004. These are classified:

High level waste comes from the reprocessing of irradiated nuclear fuel. It accounts for over 95 per cent of all the radioactivity in waste.

Intermediate level waste from sources such as nuclear reactor components, has a lower radioactivity content and heat output than high level waste, but a radioactivity content which exceeds the upper limits for low level waste.

Low level waste such as discarded protective clothing, up to and including 1993, are net waste volumes and from 1994 are packaged waste volumes. A breakdown by source is not available after 1993.

Data are further classified by the condition in which the radioactive waste is stored:

'As stored' refers to the form in which the waste is currently stored, except for low level waste, which is the estimated volume after supercompaction. Most low level waste is in short term storage prior to disposal.

'When conditioned' is the estimated volume when waste is converted into a form in which it is placed in long term storage. These estimates should be treated as indicative only.

Estimated total current and further radioactive waste arisings includes volumes to be occupied by all stocks that have arisen so far plus those likely to arise during the known life of the nuclear program (see Nirex report UK Radioactive Waste Inventory at www.nirex.co.uk for more detail regarding assumptions used).

Supercompaction was introduced in 1995 for all wastes sent to the radioactive waste repository at Drigg. This has significantly reduced volumes of disposals which no longer take place in trenches. Such waste is now immobilised in containers and placed in concrete vaults.