

RG2 REVIEW OF LEGACY WASTES

NuSAC 2007 P7 OPEN

During autumn 2006 RG2 members (PSM & WH) held discussions with BNG representatives specifically to review the status and plans for emptying the Wet Silo and the subsequent treatment and storage of the waste. Based on these discussions and on the BNG Report (NuSAC 2007 P 5), which describes the status of the four major raw waste ponds and silos at Sellafield and identifies some positive, albeit limited, progress with the installation of new equipment, it is evident that there are some major issues which need to be brought to NuSAC's attention viz:

- 1) The difficulty, in all four cases, in preparing an adequate safety case for retrieval operations, together with the absence of a definitive specification for a waste form (for disposal) means that Regulators can, when asked, justify withholding approval both for waste retrieval and its treatment. This, in turn, leads to a requirement for interim storage of the still raw waste -in order to 'characterise it more completely'. This is a regrettable approach as the resultant double-handling will lead to increased doses to operators and, inevitably, to extended periods of raw waste storage-in a form which is still not "passively safe" (although risks will be reduced). There must also be some doubt as to whether any additional information will be sufficient to overcome the Regulators' reservations.
- 2) It is therefore impossible to prepare definitive programmes (and costs) for the installation and period of operation of the major investments for the retrieval, treatment and storage of wastes that these projects demand. It seems extremely doubtful that the NII 'specifications' for waste retrieval will be met.
- 3) There is a reference in the BNG paper to "tensions between stakeholders" over the way forward. The nature of these is not specified but it is any case, not a new phenomenon; it is however particularly worrying after all

these years as overcoming them is fundamental to any future progress.

- 4) What is also apparent is the absence of a high-profile leader for these projects which, together, are comparable with the design and construction of Thorp in terms of complexity, timescale and cost. This indicates the need for a Project Director with similar standing and capability to that enjoyed by Thorp.
- 5) RG2 considers that the following are essential if satisfactory progress is to be made in this essential but hazardous area:
 - unambiguous identification of a controlling mind with appropriate authority
 - availability of adequate resources-numbers, skills, experience, technology, etc
 - Willingness of stakeholders to see their role as ‘how can we say “yes” to a way forward’ rather than concentrating on obstacles to progress.
 - Each stakeholder must take ownership of, and responsibility for, delivering his specific contribution to the project.
 - a willingness to accept solutions which are adequate, without having to demonstrate them to be the best- as it has for the past 20 years.
 - continuity of purpose and confidence over funding
 - a conscious rebuilding of morale amongst those involved in this project, emphasising the value and importance of this work and the support they are owed by others.

Peter Manning / Bill Heafield
Feb 2007