

Harwell Site Stakeholder Group

Environment Agency report

May 2016

This report covers the Environment Agency's (EA) regulation of the Harwell Nuclear Licensed Site and related issues.

Radioactive substances regulation

Permitting

In January 2016 we granted an application to partially surrender part of the site's environmental permit. The surrender covered land outside the Nuclear Licensed Site boundary at the Sutton Courtenay discharge point where the offsite discharge pipeline has been removed.

Regulation

We regulate radioactive waste disposals to the environment. We do this through environmental permits that contain limits and conditions aimed at minimising wastes and protecting the environment. We also check compliance with the permit by making regular inspections at Harwell. For all inspections we issue Radioactive Substances Compliance Assessment Forms (RASCARs). These forms summarise the inspection we carried out and clearly describe any permit breaches. Copies of RASCARs are available on Environment Agency public registers on application.

Since the last Harwell SSG meeting we have conducted an inspection of asset management arrangements at the site. We identified no breaches of the environmental permit during the inspection.

Incidents and enforcement

The Environment Agency monitors breaches of permit conditions using the Compliance Classification Scheme (CCS). This ranks breaches on a 1-4 scale, with category 1 being the most serious.

Since the last SSG meeting we have raised three non-compliances against the Harwell site. The non-compliances were related to undeclared carbon 14 (C-14) being discovered in

consignments of metal waste sent from the Harwell site to Studsvik UK's Lillyhall facility. The event did not cause any detriment to the environment. Magnox provided us with a thorough investigation on which we based our assessment. We concluded that failure to adequately identify the radionuclides contained in the waste has led to a failure to declare the C-14 in the consignment notes and that this was a breach of three environmental permit conditions. We have set actions for Magnox to complete in addition to its own internal actions aimed at learning from this event. A RASCAR containing more detail about this event will be publicly available from the Environment Agency on request.

Discharge reports

The operator at Harwell is required to report liquid and gaseous discharges to the environment on a regular basis. We examine these reports and produce a RASCAR for them. Copies of the discharge reports and the RASCARs are available on the Environment Agency public register. A digest of information is available via the Environment Agency website 'What's in your backyard?' facility¹.

Liquid and gaseous discharges from Harwell are at levels well within permitted limits.

Environmental impact

The site permit requires the operator to monitor and assess the impact of discharges on the environment. This monitoring demonstrates that the impact of the site on the environment is low.

The Environment Agencies and Food Standards Agency also carry out independent environmental monitoring around nuclear sites. The results of this work are published annually and the latest report "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment 2014" (RIFE 2014) is published on the Food Standards Agency website².

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/check-local-environmental-data>

² <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/research/radiologicalresearch/radiosurv/rife>

The RIFE report presents a yearly assessment of radiological dose to individuals in the local population who are most exposed to radiation from each nuclear licensed site. In 2014, the total dose to this 'representative person' as a result of discharges from the Harwell campus was 0.016 millisieverts (mSv). This is less than 1% of the average annual amount of radiation we all receive from natural sources (2.7 mSv/year).

Emergency preparedness

Every three years the Harwell site is required to test its ability to respond to an off-site emergency invoking the local authority multi agency response plan by holding an emergency exercise. This was last done in December 2013 and a further exercise is planned for October 2016. We are part of the multi-agency group planning for the exercise and have been attending planning meetings.

Further information

Further information on our role in regulating the use of radioactive substances and related activities on nuclear licensed sites can be found on the Environment Agency website³.

The Environment Agency's lead Nuclear Regulator for the Harwell site and its tenants is Rebecca Cleverley. Rebecca is part of the national Nuclear Regulation Group (South) (NRG(S)) which is based at the Environment Agency's Wallingford office in Oxfordshire.

NRG(S) undertakes environmental regulation of radioactive substances on nuclear licensed sites in southern England. They work closely with the local Environment Agency teams in those areas as well as external bodies such as the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

Members of the local Environment Agency team cover the site for general (non-radioactive substances) environment protection matters such as regulation of groundwater, contaminated land, waste management and water abstraction.

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³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-regulation-in-the-environment-agency>