

NDA Questions regarding Berkeley railhead

Who owns the Berkeley railhead?

This is Network Rail property which is leased by NDA. It is some distance away from the Berkeley site. It is one of a number of similar railheads around the country which are used to facilitate safe, efficient transport of nuclear materials.

Who regulates it?

It is not a nuclear site. The only times that nuclear materials are present at the railhead are when they are being transferred from road to rail *en route* from a licensed site to Sellafield. It is also used for the return journey when empty transport flasks are transferred to lorries for onward passage to sites. Currently, the Berkeley site is used for transporting waste from Harwell to Sellafield.

What precautions are carried out to ensure safety?

The railhead is only manned when operations or maintenance are taking place. There is constant CCTV surveillance, though. When waste is being transferred to rail, NTS staff will be on site. The crane will be checked before use.

Who is responsible for the integrity of the waste packages?

Packages are sealed and certified before leaving Harwell by Magnox. Their integrity is certified again when they reach their destination by Sellafield Ltd. The containers are never opened during the journey. The transport flasks themselves are each exhaustively tested to ensure that they can withstand many times the potential stress they could encounter on the journey.

Suppose there were an unexpected event?

Both Magnox and DRS (NTS) have robust procedures in place to ensure the safety and security of the packages throughout the journey. Traffic has used the railhead for many years without issues arising. In the extremely unlikely event of an incident at the railhead, trained NTS staff are on-site whenever radioactive waste is being transferred, and they would initiate all the protocols and actions to deal with the matter. Those actions and protocols have all been agreed as appropriate by the regulators.

Additional information

The waste from Harwell is ILW and comprises of various historic waste streams and waste from the former DRAGON Reactor. The material is all consigned to Sellafield through a mixture of rail and road shipments. Some of the shipments and their contents cannot be made public for security reasons.

NB: The railhead may be used for other wastes from other sites in the future.

The NDA Transport policy is to facilitate rail over road where possible, however where operational or security reasons dictate, shipments also routinely use road.

The current Harwell waste programme is forecast to conclude around April 2025, however this may be subject to change due to facility constraints at Sellafield and availability of the required transport packages.

NB: Other bodies and other waste may use the railhead during and after this time.