

Towards a sustainable management of radioactive waste

Press release
Brussels, 4 February 2002

The final disposal of high-level and/or long-lived radioactive waste in clay layers is not for tomorrow. The conclusion of the SAFIR 2 report presented by ONDRAF/NIRAS to its board of directors on Friday February 1, can be summarized in this single phrase.

Since its creation in 1980, ONDRAF/NIRAS has developed and coordinated the methodological research and development programme on the possible deep disposal of high-level and/or long-lived radioactive waste (category B & C waste) in a poorly indurated clay formation. The SAFIR 2 report provides a comprehensive review of the technical and scientific knowledge acquired during the second phase (1990-2000) of this programme. The report also develops the basic conceptual elements for one of the potential solutions: deep disposal in the Boom clay with the Ypresian clays as alternative host rock. It systematically presents the elements that support the safety of this possible solution and identifies the remaining uncertainties.

So far, the work has focused on the Boom clay in the Mol-Dessel region and, to a lesser extent, on the Ypresian clays in the Doel region. It concerns the potential host rock and hence in no way implies the choice of a site, which involves many other factors, both technical and social.

Research has reinforced the confidence in clay as a natural barrier, and confirms that deep disposal in poorly indurated clay (as the Boom clay), remains a conceivable option. Without questioning the basic choice of the Boom clay, the report states that certain important questions still have to be answered. It is therefore premature to be making decisive statements about the technical feasibility of a repository in this host formation. The same goes for the Ypresian clays.

The work performed until now can only be really validated if it is presented in a decision-making context, which meets the expectations of a modern society. This

context does not exist at present and should be put in place to find a socially acceptable solution. ONDRAF/NIRAS will take the necessary initiatives to this end.

The future work programme of ONDRAF/NIRAS will concentrate on preparing and holding a dialogue on this matter at all levels, as well as on technically and scientifically developing the options resulting from this dialogue.

For additional information, see the enclosed press file or contact Evelyn Hooft, spokeswoman of ONDRAF/NIRAS, at the telephone number 02 212 10 37 or 0475 60 25 04, or by fax at the number 02 212 10 40, or by e-mail at the following address e.hooft@nirond.be.

The technical survey of the SAFIR 2 report and the document "Towards the sustainable management of radioactive waste", which places this report in a wider context, can be consulted on the website of ONDRAF/NIRAS: www.nirond.be.