

PRESS RELEASE

New EASAC-JRC report provides framework for long term sustainable nuclear spent fuel management in Europe

An important and inevitable by-product of nuclear energy production is the spent nuclear fuel that needs to be managed and handled in a safe, responsible and effective way. Defining a spent fuel management policy is an essential step and each country managing a nuclear energy programme must ensure that the necessary technical and financial resources are available now and in the future.

A wide-ranging new report launched jointly today in Brussels by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Academies' Science Advisory Council (EASAC) details the options for spent nuclear fuel management, their present state of development and their respective risks and benefits. In particular, the report calls for a flexible adoption strategy, more targeted funding and the unavoidable need for more deep geological repositories. The report is designed specifically to help Member States implement the Directive on the responsible and safe management of spent fuel and radioactive waste (2011/70/EURATOM) which requires them to establish a dedicated policy, including the implementation of national programmes for the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste.

The report was compiled by consultation with a panel of EU and US experts and according to EASAC President Jos van der Meer captures their views on the issues raised by the need for sustainability, the need for safety, non-proliferation and security, the economic factors and public involvement, as well as on the decision-making process.

"Clearly there is an imperative for spent nuclear fuel to be managed and handled in a safe, responsible and effective way in the EU," says van der Meer. "Defining a spent fuel management policy is an essential step and each EU member state managing a nuclear energy programme must ensure that the necessary technical and financial resources are available now and in the future. This report is intended to help them make informed decisions."

The key findings and recommendations of the report are as follows:

- Choices on the different options for the management of spent fuel may differ between countries, depending on their national boundary conditions.

- Irrespective of the type of nuclear fuel cycle which is developed (with or without recycling the fuel), deep geological repositories will be needed for some of the waste products.
- Any strategy must have a high degree of built-in flexibility since the management of spent nuclear fuel will spread out over more than 100 years, during which boundary conditions such as technology development or energy policies are likely to change.
- Properly targeted funding is critical since the costs of spent fuel management are substantial and occur primarily after the energy has been produced and the revenues earned.

A fuel cycle policy will not only be based on technical or economic factors. Public involvement and acceptance are key factors for the experts, who regard public involvement and communication in the different steps of policy-making as essential.

The “Management of spent nuclear fuel and its waste” report will be launched at a joint JRC/EASAC event held on 30 September 2014, at 11h00 in Brussels at the Royal Academies for Science and the Arts of Belgium, with the participation of Vladimír Šucha, Director-General of the JRC and Jos van der Meer, President of EASAC.

The full report and an executive summary can then also be downloaded from the EASAC website www.easac.eu.

EASAC is formed by the national science academies of the EU Member States, to collaborate in giving advice to European policy-makers. EASAC provides a means for the collective voice of European science to be heard. Through EASAC, the academies work together to provide independent expert, evidence-based advice about the scientific aspects of European policies to those who make or influence policy within the European institutions.

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