

Guidance for Applications for the Low Level Waste Exclusion

Exemptions from Nuclear Third Party Liability under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 and the Nuclear Installations (Prescribed Conditions and Excepted Matter) Regulations 2025



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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

This guidance is for operators of low level radioactive waste disposal sites that accept radioactive waste from nuclear licensed sites¹. This guidance does not extend to disposal sites within the boundaries of nuclear licensed sites, which will be considered in the future. It explains the conditions that must be met and the application process for exclusion from nuclear third party liability ("NTPL") under the provisions of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 ("the 1965 Act") (as amended by the Energy Act 2023) and The Nuclear Installations (Prescribed Conditions and Excepted Matter) Regulations 2025 ("the 2025 Regulations").

1.2. Background

The UK's NTPL regime originates from the 1960 Paris Convention on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy² ("the Paris Convention"). The UK is a signatory of the Paris Convention, and as such must ensure operators of nuclear installations hold cover against nuclear third party liabilities. The operators of installations are strictly liable for injury or damage resulting from nuclear occurrences at their installations (or in transit), in exchange for a cap on their potential liability. The Government must also require operators to make provision, usually through insurance, to satisfy claims up to the capped amount.

In 2004 the Conventions were amended through the Protocol to Amend the Paris Convention³ and the Protocol to Amend the Brussels Supplementary Convention⁴. The amendments included installations for the disposal of nuclear waste ("relevant disposal sites") within the NTPL regime. These amendments were implemented into UK law via the Nuclear Installations (Liability for Damage) Order 2016 and were effective from 1 January 2022. Operators of relevant disposal sites are therefore required to hold insurance cover against nuclear third party liabilities. Relevant disposal sites include disposal sites accepting low and very low level radioactive waste of nuclear origin (i.e. originating on a nuclear licensed site).

However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Nuclear Energy Agency's Steering Committee for Nuclear Energy, which is responsible for the Conventions

¹ Radioactive waste that was produced on a nuclear site falls within the definition of "nuclear matter" in the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 and referred to in this document as "radioactive waste from nuclear sites".

² https://www.oecd-nea.org/jcms/pl_20196/paris-convention-on-third-party-liability-in-the-field-of-nuclear-energy-paris-convention-or-pc

³ The Protocol of 12th February 2004 to amend the Convention on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy of 29th July 1960, as amended by the Additional Protocol of 28th January 1964 and by the Protocol of 16th November 1982.

⁴ The protocol of 12th February 2004 to amend the convention of 31st January 1963 Supplementary to the Paris Convention of 29th July 1960 on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy, as amended by the Additional Protocol of 28th January 1964 and by the Protocol of 16th November 1982.

governing NTPL recognised that some disposal sites accepting radioactive waste from nuclear sites do not pose sufficient risk of a nuclear occurrence to justify maintaining NTPL cover.

It therefore issued a decision to exclude such disposal sites from the requirement to hold NTPL cover. The UK has implemented the OECD NEA 2016 Decision via section 304⁵ of the Energy Act 2023 and the 2025 Regulations. We refer to both the amended provisions in the 1965 Act and the 2025 Regulations as the Low Level Waste Exclusion.

1.3. "Relevant" and "Excluded" disposal sites

Under the 1965 Act a "Relevant Disposal Site" is a site which is subject to provisions that require insurance cover against nuclear third party liabilities.

A site that is exempted from the requirement to hold insurance cover against nuclear third party liabilities is referred to as an "Excluded Disposal Site".

In order to benefit from Excluded Disposal Site status and the Low Level Waste Exclusion, site operators must submit an application containing certain evidence to the Secretary of State to satisfy him/her that the site has met the Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions, which are:

- Permit condition.
- Site history condition.
- Dose condition.
- Criticality condition.

If the Secretary of State is satisfied that the Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions have been met by the application and supporting evidence, the Secretary of State will give notice in writing to the operator stating that the site is now an 'Excluded Disposal Site' and therefore no longer subject to the NTPL regime.

Further information about suitable supporting evidence and the application process are outlined in the rest of this document.

⁵ which amends the 1965 Act and introduces new sections 7C and 7D https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/52/section/304/enacted

The Conditions for exclusion from NTPL

In order to obtain Excluded Disposal Site status, operators will need to provide evidence demonstrating the Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions have been met.

Existing sites – those that have already accepted consignments of radioactive waste – must provide evidence that all Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions are met. This includes the site history condition in section 2.12)

New sites – those that have not yet accepted the first consignment of radioactive waste – do not need to provide evidence towards the site history condition (section 2.2).

Sites that have transferred in ownership from one operator to another after previously having accepted radioactive waste from nuclear sites are not considered to be 'new sites' and must therefore submit an application as an existing site and meet the site history condition.

2.1 Permit condition

The permit condition will be met by operators that can satisfy the Secretary of State that they have a current environmental permit (in England and Wales) or environmental authorisation (in Scotland) which prevents the site from receiving radioactive waste from nuclear sites that exceeds the radioactivity concentration limits set out in paragraph 3(a) of the Appendix to the OECD NEA 2016 Decision (see Annex A to this guidance).

Suitable evidence would be a copy of the current environmental permit/authorisation, if it has conditions on radioactivity concentrations that are equal to or stricter than those in Annex A. The sum of fractions equation should be considered as part of the permit conditions, permits which allow the operator to accept concentrations of radioactivity which would create a sum of fractions greater than one will not meet the permit condition. The operator should explicitly request (for example, in a permit application or through a permit variation application) that the relevant environment agency includes these conditions in the permit/authorisation before submitting an application for the Low Level Waste Exclusion. This will give the necessary evidence that the radioactivity concentration limits for all nine radionuclides in the OECD NEA 2016 Decision will continue to be met by the operator.

2.2 Site history condition

For existing sites and sites that have transferred ownership, the site history condition will be met if the Secretary of State is satisfied that the operator has never accepted radioactive waste from nuclear sites that exceeds the radioactivity concentration limits set out in paragraph 3(a) of the Appendix to the OECD NEA 2016 Decision (see Annex A to this guidance) or, if it has, that the offending waste has since been removed from the site.

Historic environmental permits or authorisations can be used to demonstrate compliance with this condition if they had the effect of preventing the operator from receiving radioactive waste from nuclear sites that exceeded the radioactivity concentration limits set out in paragraph 3(a) of the Appendix to the OECD NEA 2016 Decision.

Note that the permits or authorisations used to demonstrate compliance with the site history condition need only relate to the first seven of the radionuclides listed in the Appendix. Although activity concentration limits lower than 200 Becquerels per gramme (Bq/g) are required for two radioisotopes (Plutonium-239 and Americium-241), the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has provided reassurance to the Department that no significant concentrations of Pu 239 and Am241 have been disposed of in existing permitted disposal facilities.

An operator wishing to rely on historic permits or authorisations will need to provide copies of all permits or authorisations from when the site first started receiving radioactive waste showing the permitted radioactivity concentration limits of both nuclear and non-nuclear radioactive waste.

If there have been any breaches of the permit/authorisation that exceed the radioactivity concentrations limits in the OECD NEA 2016 decision, operators will also need to provide evidence that any such breaches have been addressed by removing the offending material and managing it appropriately elsewhere.

2.3 Dose condition

The dose condition will be met if the Secretary of State is satisfied that the effective dose from radiation released from the site to a member of the public located off the disposal site, in all reasonably foreseeable circumstances (including accidents) and assuming no protective or mitigating actions are taken, would be no greater than 1 millisievert in any 12-month period. This condition is required to be met for as long as an environmental permit or authorisation will be required for the site. The applicant will need to provide evidence as part of their application that the dose condition will be met for the whole period while the disposal site is operating, and also a post-closure period (the period between operations ceasing and the site ceasing to be subject to an environmental permit or authorisation for radioactive substances). For both the operational and post-closure periods, the evidence provided should assume that the maximum permissible levels of radioactivity under the environmental permit or authorisation are present (i.e. as if the disposal site were full).

For any disposal site which is not permitted to contain inventories of radionuclides in excess of the limits stated in Schedule 1 to REPPIR, the operator can evidence compliance with the dose condition using the total allowable inventories in the environmental permit. Any confirmations sent to or from HSE or ONR stating the Schedule 1 limits will not be met should also be provided.

Recommended evidence for demonstrating that the dose condition will be met during the operational and post-closure periods is assessments of off-site dose included as part of the Environmental Safety Case (ESC) required for the site by the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. This is described in the joint environment authorities' "Guidance on Requirements for Authorisation" (the GRA). The ESC provided should demonstrate that the site will not exceed the annual 1 millisievert off-site dose limit during the operational and post closure periods. However, we do not consider that the dose assessments from the ESC will sufficiently cover accident scenarios, and so further suitable evidence may be required.

Additional recommended supporting evidence for meeting the dose condition for accident scenarios during the operational period could include a Hazard Evaluation and Consequence Report (HECA) that may have been submitted to the Health and Safety Executive in accordance with regulation 4 of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019⁶ (REPPIR), and which is described further in the associated publication of Approved Code of Practice and Guidance (ACOP). If the applicant considers that, by regulation 3(2) of REPPIR, the requirements of REPPIR do not apply and they are not required to submit a HECA to the Health and Safety Executive, then evidence of why this is the case should be provided in support of the application for the Low Level Waste Exclusion. DESNZ may seek advice from the Health and Safety Executive that the information submitted is suitable and/or in accordance with their records.

⁶ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/703/contents/made

2.4 Criticality condition

The criticality condition will be met if the Secretary of State is satisfied that, for as long as an environmental permit or authorisation will be required for the site, the possibility of a criticality incident will not arise.

An operator should be able to demonstrate meeting the condition by providing the criticality assessment that formed part of the Environmental Safety Case used to secure the site's environmental permit or authorisation. This is described in the joint Environment Authorities' "Guidance on Requirements for Authorisation" (the GRA).

We expect applicants to base their criticality assessment on the latest version of the GRA, should it be updated.⁷ Should an operator, or the relevant environmental regulator, determine that their safety case, made in line with earlier guidance, is not consistent with updated guidance, the operator may choose, or be required to, submit a revised criticality assessment to the relevant environment agency. Revised criticality assessments would then be reevaluated under the normal regulatory process for maintaining the Environmental Safety Case for the site. Applications for the Low Level Waste Exclusion are more likely to be accepted if the applicant can show that their existing criticality assessment that forms part of their safety case is consistent with the latest GRA.

⁷ UK environmental regulators consulted in November 2024 on a revised version of the GRA.

3. The Application Process

Please send applications via email to: LLWExclusion@energysecurity.gov.uk. The site operator must provide evidence as outlined in section 2 to the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). The supporting evidence must demonstrate that all of the relevant conditions have been met before the Low Level Waste Exclusion can be granted for a site.

The 1965 Act requires operators of relevant disposal sites to give the DESNZ Secretary of State notice of their arrangements regarding nuclear third party liability, including giving two months' notice before ceasing to hold cover against nuclear third party liabilities. An application for exclusion from NTPL will be shared with the relevant DESNZ officials for awareness of the operator's plans, and these officials may need to contact the operator directly. However, it remains the responsibility of the operator and/or their insurers to take appropriate steps to ensure the DESNZ Secretary of State is provided with the required two months' notice before ceasing to hold the required NTPL funds.

DESNZ officials will also share information on applications received from sites in Scotland with the Scottish Government. This will allow Scottish Government to allow Scottish Ministers to exercise their powers in relation to the NTPL regime.

3.1 Notice of Exclusion from The Nuclear Third Party Liability Regime

If the DESNZ Secretary of State is satisfied that the four conditions for exclusion are met, he or she will give notice in writing to the operator confirming that the disposal is now an "Excluded Disposal Site". The Low Level Waste exclusion will apply, and the operator will no longer be required to have NTPL cover for the disposal site.

3.2 Notice of Continued Exclusion When There Is a Change of Operator

When a new operator takes control of an Excluded Disposal Site and wishes to maintain the Low Level Waste exclusion they must write, within one month, to notify the DESNZ Secretary of State of the transfer at LLWExclusion@energysecurity.gov.uk. The new operator must request a notice of continued exclusion and enclose a copy of the environmental permit/authorisation and confirmation that the radioactivity concentration limits and total allowable radioactive waste inventory have not changed.

The DESNZ Secretary of State will give the new operator a notice in writing confirming that the site continues to be an Excluded Disposal Site if he/she is content that the site previously benefited from the Low Level Waste Exclusion and there have been no disqualifying changes to the environmental permit/authorisation.

If a new operator does not apply for a notice of continued exclusion within one month from the day on which the environmental permit or authorisation transfers to the new owner, the Low Level Waste Exclusion will cease to apply to the site and the operator will be required to hold NTPL cover.⁸

⁸ Section 7C(7) of the 1965 Act.

4. Requirements for maintaining the Low Level Waste Exclusion

The Low Level Waste Exclusion will automatically cease to apply if a site no longer meets the permit condition, the dose condition or the criticality condition.⁹ Failure to have NTPL cover approved by the Secretary of State (or by Scottish Ministers for sites in Scotland) in place when such cover is required is a criminal offence.¹⁰

Operators of disposal sites that have been successful in their applications for the Low Level Waste exclusion should therefore consider and assess any potential changes to their sites and whether these will impact their ability to meet the conditions for exclusion (see section 2 of this Guidance). Changes that are likely to result in the Low Level Waste Exclusion ceasing to apply include an increase in the permitted radioactivity inventory, changes to quantities or methods of disposal for fissile material, or any changes that may increase the effective dose received during any potential radiological incident.

If an operator is unsure whether a change will prevent the conditions for exclusion being met, they should resubmit their application with updated evidence that takes account of the change.

In cases where waste exceeding the allowed radioactivity concentration limits is disposed of at the site (referred to in the 1965 Act as "Disqualifying Matter") operators must follow the process detailed in section 5 of this guidance.

⁹ Section 7C(7) of the 1965 Act.

¹⁰ Section 19(5) of the 1965 Act.

5. How to notify the Secretary of State of a Contravention

Operators of Excluded Disposal Sites should not accept waste that exceeds the radioactivity concentration limits set out in the environmental permit or authorisation issued in respect of the site.

Operators of Excluded Disposal Sites should only accept waste that complies with the conditions in their environmental permit/authorisation. Excluded Disposal Sites require an active environmental permit or authorisation with radioactivity concentration limits equal to or stricter than those in paragraph 3(a) of the Appendix to the OECD NEA 2016 Decision (provided in Annex A of this guidance), including using the equation for mixtures of radionuclides. Each consignment of waste should meet the permit conditions and hence should not exceed the Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions.

If waste is accepted (or is later found to have been accepted) that exceeds these limits, the Low Level Waste Exclusion conditions are considered to have been breached. The Secretary of State must be notified of the breach within 21 days of the operator becoming aware of it. If the Secretary of State is not notified within 21 days, the site will no longer benefit from the Low Level Waste Exclusion and NTPL cover will be legally required. Notifications should be via the LLWExclusion@energysecurity.gov.uk email address. In the event that the environmental permit is also breached, operators should not assume that a notification sent to the relevant environment agency will be shared with the DESNZ Secretary of State.

Notification of a breach begins the "removal period" ¹². To remain an Excluded Disposal Site following a breach and notification to the Secretary of State, the operator must, within 90 days remove the offending material and obtain written confirmation from the Secretary of State that they are satisfied that the offending waste has been removed from the site. We would recommend operators demonstrate that the offending material has been removed by submitting to the Secretary of State the same evidence the operator supplied to the relevant environment agency – this may include a report on how the waste was identified and retrieved, photographic or video evidence, or records including waste consignment notes showing where the waste has been sent elsewhere.

The Secretary of State has discretion to extend the removal period. Requests to extend the removal period should be sent to LLWExclusion@energysecurity.gov.uk, clearly stating the steps that are being taken to remove the waste and why it is not possible to do so within the 90-day period.

¹¹ Section 7D(4) of the 1965 Act.

¹² Section 7D(6) of the 1965 Act allows 90 days for "disqualifying material" to be removed from a disposal before the exemption from NTPL ceases, this is the "removal period".

Annex A: The exclusion conditions, as defined in the OECD NEA 2016 Decision

The OECD NEA 2016 Decision is implemented via the Energy Act 2023 amendments to the 1965 Nuclear Installations Act. The new sections 7C and 7D of the 1965 Act create the mechanism by which sites can be excluded from the NTPL regime. The relevant parts of the OECD NEA 2016 Decision have been included for reference below.

The conditions are outlined in the OECD NEA 2016 Decision as follows:

In order for a nuclear installation for the disposal of solid radioactive waste to be excluded from the application of the Paris Convention it must: i) meet the radioactivity concentration limits in paragraph (a) below; and if these limits are met, ii) submit to the competent national authority, for review and appraisal, a comprehensive installation-specific safety assessment to confirm that the dose and criticality criteria described in paragraph (b) below are met.

Radioactivity Concentration Criterion

The radioactivity concentration criterion is stipulated in the OECD NEA 2016 Decision as follows:

(a) Radioactivity concentration limits

A nuclear installation for the disposal of certain types of solid low-level radioactive waste may be excluded from the application of the Paris Convention if the average radioactivity concentration¹³ of the radioactive waste disposed of/to be disposed of at the installation does not/will not exceed the generic activity concentration limits as set out below¹⁴:

¹³ Averaged over the activity concentration over a maximum of 10 tonnes of packaged or unpackaged waste or over the mass of each large item of waste (e.g. steam generator, pressuriser or large vessel) greater than 10 tonnes.

¹⁴ The radionuclide activity concentration limits are designed to limit public exposures to less than 10 mSv in a year, and assume that no protective or remedial actions have been taken. In setting the limits a reference basis including a disposal volume of 90 000 m₃ was used.

Radionuclide	Activity Concentration (Bq/g)
H-3	10 000
C-14	10 000
Co-60	200
Sr-90	200
Tc-99	200
Cs-137	200
U-238	200
Pu-239	100
Am-241	100

Isotope mixtures:

For nuclear installations for the disposal of radioactive waste containing more than one radionuclide (n) the activity concentration of the different radionuclides (Ai) in paragraph 3(a) must meet the following criterion:

$$\sum_{i=1 \text{ to } n} \frac{A_i}{A_{i \text{ lim}}} \le 1$$

where Ai lim is the activity concentration limit for radionuclide i.

"Disqualifying matter" is defined in the 1965 Act as any radioactive waste that exceeds the limits stated above.

Dose and Criticality Criteria

In the OECD NEA 2016 Decision, the dose and criticality criteria are defined as follows:

If an installation meets the generic radioactivity concentration limits specified in paragraph 3(a), then it can undergo a comprehensive installation-specific safety assessment.

The installation may not be excluded unless the assessed annual effective dose off-site to a representative person, assumed to be a member of the public, under all reasonably foreseeable conditions during the period of regulatory control (including the operational period and a period post-closure), including accidental occurrences to the extent as stipulated in relevant national regulations and internationally recognised guidance, and assuming that protective or mitigating actions have not been taken, is less than or equal to 1 mSv per year.

The installation-specific safety assessment must demonstrate that the criticality risk is negligible.

The installation-specific safety assessment must take into account the effective dose that may result from any non-nuclear waste that may be disposed of at the installation.

The decision stipulates that:

- The annual dose to an off-site representative person, assumed to be a member of the public, in all reasonably foreseeable circumstances must not be above 1mSv.
- This assessment must consider the full period of regulatory control, including a postclosure period.
- Accidental occurrences must be considered.
- The assessment should be made on the assumption that protective and mitigating actions have not been taken.

Annex B: Detailed Analysis by The NDA On The Radioactivity Concentrations Of Pu239 And Am241 Already Consigned To Disposal Sites

Note that the existing sites that we expect to apply for the Low Level Waste Exclusion have overall requirements for radioactivity concentration of 200 Bq/g or lower. This means that if the existing site has remained within its environmental permit/authorisation requirements, it will have been compliant with the limits for the first seven radionuclides in the table in part 3a of the OECD NEA 2016 Decision. However, in theory, it is possible that the existing sites could have received waste that breaches the radioactivity concentration limits for Pu239 and Am241, which are 100 Bg/g¹⁵.

DESNZ commissioned the NDA to examine information about radioactive waste sent to landfills to determine whether any such waste is likely to have had radioactivity concentrations of Pu239 or Am241 exceeding 100 Bq/g. The NDA examined the UK Radioactive Waste & Materials Inventories for 2013 and 2019.

The UK Radioactive Waste & Materials Inventory is the national record on radioactive wastes and materials in the UK.

The Inventory contains information about:

- radioactive wastes that exist now;
- radioactive wastes that will arise in future; and
- radioactive materials these are radioactive items that are not classed as waste now but may be in future if no further use can be found for them.

The Inventory is updated every three years. It is a snapshot of wastes and materials at a specific point in time, called the 'stock date'.

¹⁵ Although this is possible in theory that waste with concentrations of > 100 Bq/g for Pu239 and Am241 has been sent to landfill, it is highly unlikely, as it would imply that these two radionuclides were the most prevalent in the waste (given that the overall radioactivity concentration limit is 200 Bq/g) and, in practice, these radionuclides are not the most prevalent in waste sent to permitted/authorised landfill disposals.

For each radioactive waste stream, the following data is recorded:

- Description of waste stream
- Waste stream identification code
- Waste classification
- Volume in stock (existing volumes)
- Volumes forecast to arise and associated time periods
- Radioactivity concentration (known as 'specific activity')
- Current or planned waste treatment and packaging.

Full information about each waste stream is contained within individual Waste Stream Data Sheets.

The NDA used the 2013 and 2019 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory databases to assess every LLW (including VLLW) waste stream, both stocks and arisings, for its Am241 and Pu239 activity. Waste streams for which the Am241 or Pu239 activity contributions are/were greater than 50% of the total waste stream radioactivity concentration were recorded for further analysis. These waste streams were overlayed with routing data (i.e. data on where the waste has been or will be sent for disposal) for the 2019 database analysis (this information was not collected in 2013). By cross referencing those data points, the NDA arrived at a small number of waste streams that had, or are planned to have, at least some routing to permitted/authorised landfill disposal sites. All 1318 Waste Streams in the 2019 UK RWI were part of the examination. Of those 1318 streams, 207 have sent or plan to send some waste to landfill. NDA considered it only necessary to carry out detailed assessment of a small number of those 207 streams because they had either not sent any waste or of that it was very unlikely that the radioactivity concentrations approached the 100Bq/g limit.

Using Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Waste Management Services operational and industry expertise, the NDA then carried out checks on a limited subset of consignment data, which confirmed that the radioactivity concentrations of waste streams that have already been sent to landfill or are planned to be sent to landfill have verified Am241 and/or Pu239 radioactivity concentrations to be significantly lower that the levels that would concern the exclusion conditions (100 Bq/g).

Based on this analysis, DESNZ considers that it is highly unlikely that waste with Pu239 or Am241 radioactivity concentrations of greater than 100 Bq/g have been sent to UK permitted/authorised landfills. We consider this analysis to be adequate for the purposes of determining whether the Low Level Waste Exclusion limits for these two radionuclides have been met at the existing LLW disposal sites that are eligible to apply for the Low Level Waste Exclusion.

This publication is available from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-third-party-liability-exemption-for-llw-sites
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