



2002 Japan's radioactive waste management program

Low-level radioactive waste

Low-level solid radioactive waste generated by nuclear power plants has been buried at Japan's Rokkasho-mura facility since 1992. License application for additional disposal was started in 1997.

Spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste

Spent nuclear fuel is stored at reactors in pools. High-level radioactive waste is converted to a solid form (vitrified) and stored on-site for 30-50 years for cooling. It will eventually be transported to a deep geologic disposal facility. At-reactor dry storage for spent nuclear fuel is currently being developed. Dry storage for high-level radioactive waste is also being developed at the Rokkasho-mura site.

Reprocessing spent nuclear fuel

Japan reprocesses its spent nuclear fuel to control the volume and maximize its resources since all fuel must be imported. Spent nuclear fuel is currently reprocessed by France and the United Kingdom and returned to Japan. Japan's first reprocessing plant is scheduled to open in 2003 in Rokkasho-mura.

Transporting radioactive waste

Most spent nuclear fuel is transported for reprocessing via ships, since most of Japan's spent nuclear fuel was reprocessed abroad, and many of its nuclear power plants are located on the coast. Transportation to the inland reprocessing plant at Tokai has been by truck.

Deep geologic disposal plans

In October 1998, Japan's Nuclear Cycle Development Institute (JNC) submitted a report to the Japanese government documenting Japan's radioactive waste disposal research and development activities since 1992. JNC's primary objective is to assess the technical reliability of geologic disposal in the country.

In October 2000, Japan established the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NUMO) to implement geologic disposal in the country. Japan hopes to begin site selection and characterization, followed by infrastructure creation and site licensing. Construction of a repository in granite or sedimentary rock is planned for the 2030s.

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U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management

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