Press release

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Final disposal nearing realization

Today SKB is submitting its latest research programme (RD&D -07) to the Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate (SKI). The method for final disposal of spent nuclear fuel described in the programme has now been developed to the point that licensing can begin. Furthermore, the siting work is in its final phase and SKB plans to select the site for the final repository in 2009.

According to the requirements in the Nuclear Activities Act, an account of the state of knowledge and the research situation in the nuclear waste field shall be submitted every third year. The account is reviewed and circulated for comment by the regulatory authorities and then serves as a basis for final Government decisions. The programme now being submitted is the ninth in succession.

“An intensive effort is currently under way to evaluate all the material from the site investigations in Forsmark and Oskarshamn. We expect to be able to select one of the sites in 2009 and then submit an application for a permit to build the final repository on that site,” says Claes Thegerström, president of SKB.

The programme also contains an update of the state of knowledge regarding other methods whose development is being followed by SKB. The report concludes that SKB’s method, which entails that the nuclear fuel is deposited in copper canisters at a depth of about 400–700 metres, has the best prospects of being able to protect man and the environment in the long term.

The deep boreholes concept, which entails deposition of the fuel at a depth of several kilometres, is deemed to have such great fundamental weaknesses in terms of long-term safety that continued research cannot be justified. Partitioning and transmutation, which entails transforming portions of the nuclear waste from long-lived to short-lived by means of extensive nuclear processes, does not eliminate the necessity for a final repository. SKB will continue to keep watch on the development of these methods, even though they are not to be regarded as feasible alternatives.

The research programme also describes the development work being pursued in other parts of the nuclear waste programme. Among other things, an expansion is planned in 2020 of the final repository for radioactive operational waste in Forsmark in order to dispose of decommissioning waste.

In addition to describing the state of knowledge regarding technical development, RD&D -07 also describes SKB’s social science research programme, which started in 2004.

Svensk Kärnbränslehantering AB
Mailing address Box 5864, SE-102 40 Stockholm, Sweden
Street address Brahegatan 47
Telephone +46 8 459 84 00 *Fax* +46 8 661 57 19
www.skb.se
Corp. ID No. 556175-2014 Domicile Stockholm

Contact persons: Tommy Hedman, head of Technology Department, +46 8 459 85 21, +46 70 659 83 01, and Anni Bölenius, press manager, +46 8 459 85 87, +46 70 567 67 04