NUCLEAR MONITOR

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Why we resist Sellafield and all that it brings

Article by A Quiet Resistance and Radiation Free Lakeland

Ticking Boxes

"For extra tea and flashy things, that overtime some boxes bring with
Elements whose mass can change the genes of everything in range.
Trapped outside their ticking box where spillage flows like molten rocks
With dangers left to grow unseen until one idle Chargehand's scream said
"Shut it down and do it quick before we're all in deepest shit there's been
Another situation, critical to every nation."

Extract from poem, Ticking Boxes, by Duncan Ball, one of the founders of Radiation Free Lakeland



Image: Duncan Ball outside Sellafield

Resistance seems futile?

To read of the measured consequences of disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima, you would be forgiven for believing that all the fuss about nuclear contamination is over nothing. The final death count from Chernobyl has been highly contested ever since Valery Legasov predicted 40,000; meanwhile, more people were said to be affected by forced evacuations during Fukushima than by radiation-related illnesses.

You'd think the fires would be left to burn if radioactive release is of so little consequence.

Yet the nuclear industry publicly plays up its attention to safety, with all the procedures and protocols in place so they can say disaster is an 'unlikely event'.

Then again, whistleblowers—scientists and engineers—complaining of inconsistent and dangerous practices at Sellafield have been vilified and forced out of their jobs.

Some, like Duncan Ball, one of the early founders of Radiation Free Lakeland, died of radiation-related illness at a young age, a consequence that tells more than paperwork, ticked boxes, and claims of safety.

A former Sellafield foreman, Duncan's experience followed the same route as dissident scientists, "Rodney Fordham, John Taylor, Ross Hesketh and Trevor Brown[,] ... scientists who worked in the British nuclear power program. Each of them expressed doubts about some aspect of nuclear safety, initially through normal internal procedural channels. When they made their criticisms public, or threatened to do so, the nuclear industry attacked them in various ways, such as by criticism of their work, transferral or dismissal". Ref: Rob Edwards, "A new kind of nuclear victim", New Statesman, 22 July 1983, pp. 8-10.)
The nuclear industry is riddled with contradictions over safety, blessed with laissez-faire attention from regulators and slavering enthusiasm from local councillors, and greenlighted by credulous MPs.
Organisations like Radiation Free Lakeland exist because without them, proper scrutiny would be avoided. Power must be held to account, but it's a slow, complicated road, like most travel in Sellafield's home of West Cumbria.

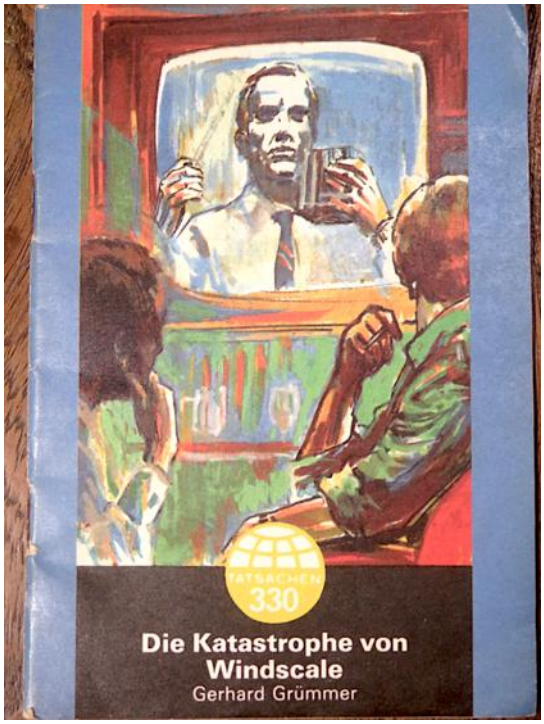


Image: A road near Sellafield

Sellafield became

(AQR) My dad was a 9-year-old kid in Workington on October 10th, 1957, the date the Windscale Fire put West Cumbria on the nuclear disaster map. Marked 5 out of 7 on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES), Windscale's disaster was an 'accident with wider consequences'. Consequences an order of magnitude beyond local.
Winds took radiation east across the UK and further afield to Eastern Europe, despite contemporary claims that it blew out across the sea to the north.
Within a 10–20 km radius of Windscale, the UK government under Harold Macmillan imposed a milk ban for a month, due to the known carcinogenic effects of Iodine-131 passing through milk to the human thyroid gland. Less was said about polonium, tritium, and other elements released at the same time, and documents were classified until the 1980s to ensure the details didn't get out.
Although various studies have claimed there were up to 100–200 cancer-related deaths associated with the event, the delay between the disaster and later developing cancers and radiation-linked diseases has made certainty impossible. My dad and his siblings didn't seem to have been affected by the event, but I've long been suspicious of the health problems in later generations of his sister's family. Little is ever said about the ways in which women and children are specifically harmed by radioactive releases, differently from men. (AQR)
Despite the site's later civil use in the production of electricity alongside plutonium for bombs at Calder Hall, Windscale Pile 1 was purely a plutonium factory, a military site, for the purposes of constructing atomic bombs.
German biologist and science writer, Gerhard Grümmer, wrote in his booklet, Die Katastrophe von Windscale, that at the time of the fire,

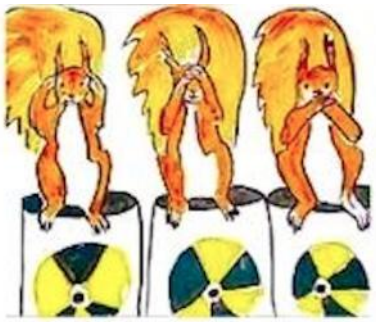
'Calder Hall I, and the Calder Hall II plant, which was under construction, were shown on the map. Next to them were the Windscale I and II plutonium factories, as well as a building where plutonium was extracted. "Bomb-clean plutonium," the newspapers assured, "usable for military purposes!"' (Google translated).



Over the decades, the site's functions expanded. From 1964, it began reprocessing spent MAGNOX fuel, separating plutonium from uranium for use in weapons.
In 1981, the name was changed to Sellafield.
Now larger than surrounding villages and towns, with a contaminated concrete and steel mass visible from Lakeland's Coniston Old Man on a clear day, its presence dominates West Cumbria.
Windscale Pile I, the site of the 1957 fire, is still being decommissioned, 69 years after the fire, testament to how dangerous and complicated radioactive material can be.
Despite the fudging of numbers, the denials of deaths, and the refusal to get behind public responsibility, the inherent danger of radioactive materials is real, and must not be dismissed as 'radiophobia' or anxiety.

Early days, and why the fight is so tough on a local level

Radiation Free Lakeland was formed following a Cumbria County Council meeting in November 2008 in which furious County Councillors were not allowed to vote on whether or not to 'express an interest' in a nuclear dump. The decision was to be left to a few councillors on the Cabinet.
At that heated Cumbria County Council meeting, Radiation Free Lakeland took along a small placard which is still the group's logo today.



Radiation Free
Lakeland

Three red squirrels seated on barrels of nuclear waste "Hear no Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil," a reference to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) tax-payer-funded nuclear slush fund, which—then, and now—has saturated almost every facet of Cumbrian life. Charities, local businesses and wildlife groups have all taken the nuclear bung.
Maybe this language sounds inflammatory to you. We're so used to reading unimpassioned phrasing of terrible events in the News. But Sellafield Ltd. funded by the UK Government's

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority owns almost the whole of West Cumbria, one way or another. Play parks are funded by the 'company' and commissioned by local councils. Town councils partially fund their 'town deals' with public money filtered through the NDA. Charities take it, too, because 'free' money is hard to come by in today's economic climate.

Local people are frequently ambivalent to the dangers presented by the nuclear facility partly because in a widely impoverished area with lousy infrastructure—terrible roads, broken railway service, and inconsistent buses, hospitals frequently over an hour's drive away, few NHS dentists, limited secondary school options, limited work—they'll take the benefits provided by a flow of money at a community level, rather than struggle to live in the place they love. Add to that the constant nudging on social media about the 'benefits' provided to the area by the nuclear industry, and the apparent withdrawal from the nuclear fight by environmental NGOs—it's not surprising that people have gradually found it harder to figure out who is working with their best interests in mind.

The bung is now dressed up with the socially acceptable title of 'Social Impact Funding', with additional funding available for areas willing to accept the 'search' for a suitable location for the newest nuclear dump proposals. But no number of play parks, reinvigorated buildings and clever arguments will save West Cumbrians in the face of a nuclear disaster. Or from the slow trickle of tritium, technetium, or plutonium into the ground water.

We stopped the nuclear dump before. We can do it again.

Despite the nuclear largesse, RaFL's lobbying and campaigning, underpinned by advice from



Image: Radiation Free Lakeland Demonstration at Bowness in 2013

scientists and geologists, led to other groups becoming active to fight the plan.

Together, we lobbied for Cumbria County Council to hold a full debate and full vote by all councillors, and that informed the Cabinet's decision in 2013 not to proceed with the nuclear dump plan for onshore burial of nuclear wastes.

But now the plan is back. It is worse than ever, with an intention to bury 140 tonnes of plutonium (not to mention over 27 nuclear submarine hulls) under the seabed off the Cumbrian coastline.

Even if the science for geological disposal was solid, which it isn't, the leaks and releases from Sellafield over the years do not lend the kind of trust needed for an undertaking of this magnitude.

The nuclear dump timeline shows just how the nuclear dump net is tightening around Cumbria.

NUCLEAR DUMP TIMELINE

1997

Cumbria County Council's rejection of exploratory boreholes (a Rock Characterisation Facility) triggers a public inquiry. The Inspector says, "the location should be in a region of low hydraulic gradients, so that there should be

slow-moving and long groundwater pathways; the geology and hydrogeology of the site and its district should be readily characterisable and predictable."
~ Chris McDonald, NIREX Inquiry Inspector.
Letter from Chris McDonald to the Guardian 2007
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/28/nuclear.uk

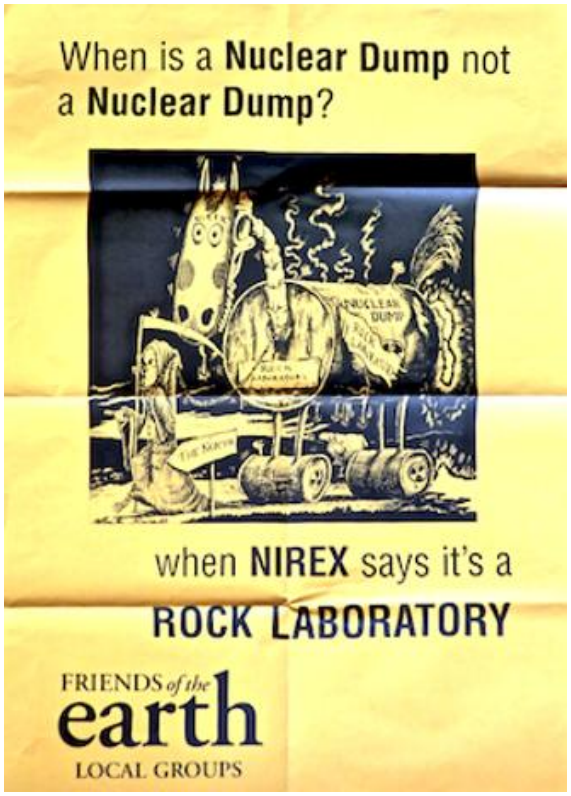


Image: Friends of the Earth 1990s poster opposing nuclear dump

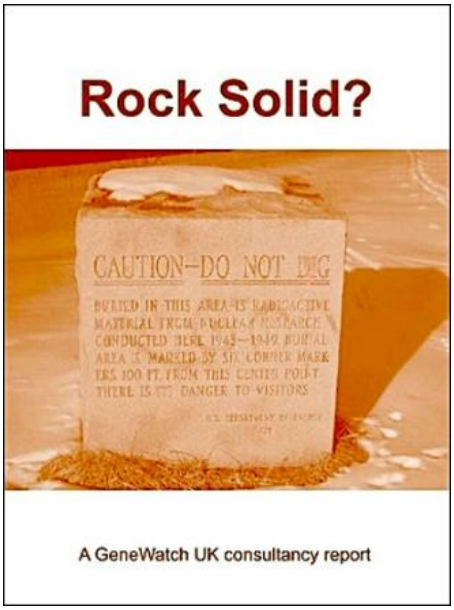
2008

"Geological disposal safety plans do not assume that total containment by engineered barrier systems forever is possible."
~Dr Adrian Bath, Engineered Barrier Systems: What are they for and how do they relate to the geosphere? A Presentation.
https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/~/media/shared/documents/policy/Policy%20Meetings/Bath.pdf?la=en



Image: Radiation Free Lakeland Demonstration "Save Lakeland, No Nuke Dump."

Volunteer group, Radiation Free Lakeland, formed in 2008 to fight the Geological Disposal Facility plans.



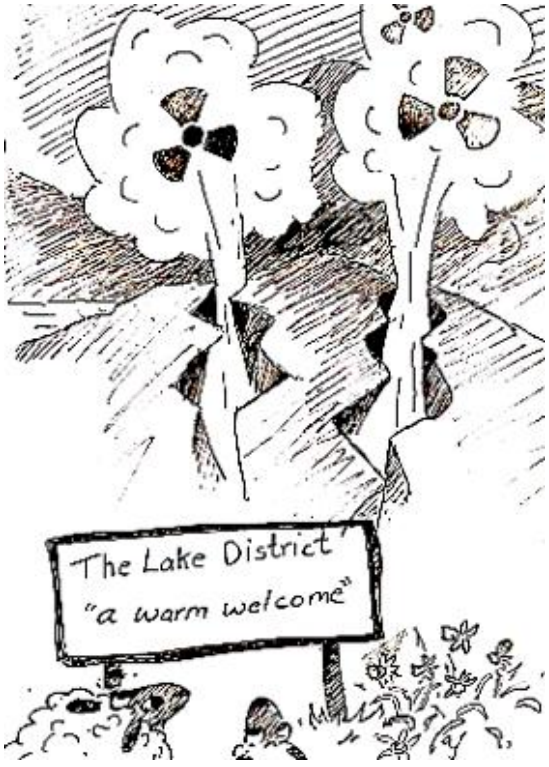
2010

"Build-up of gas pressure in the repository, as a result of the corrosion of metals and/or the degradation of organic material, could damage the barriers and force fast routes for radionuclide escape through crystalline rock fractures or clay rock pores."
~Dr Helen Wallace, Rock Solid? A scientific review Sept 15th 2010 https://temelin.cz/ke-stazeni/odborne-studie/rock-solid-helen-wallace-genewatch-uk-eng

2011

”I would like us to set a goal of putting the first waste into a geological disposal facility by the end of 2029. I have tasked the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority to look at opportunities for accelerating progress to meet this aim.”

~Charles Hendry MP, Chair of the Geological Disposal Implementation Board, Department of Energy and Climate Change Press Release 28th June 2011.



2012

“This groundwater will return to the surface [or the sea bed] much faster, within a few decades, if hot temperature, high-level waste is also buried. That heat will also make the land surface rise. No earthquakes or extra rainfall are needed.”

~Professor Stuart Haszeldine OBE FRSE C.Geol, Cockermouth Public Meeting Feb 2nd 2012

2013

“When I came away from the International Conference in Canada, after speaking to many experts from all over the world, I was quite convinced that there was no alternative to a GDF. Then I started my research in earnest … the more I read and studied and listened, the less certain I became that a GDF in Cumbria was the solution to Cumbria’s or the UK’s nuclear waste.” Council Leader Eddie Martin’s speech to Cumbria County Council’s Cabinet 30th January 2013 when CCC voted not to proceed with GDF “steps”.

https://mariannewildart.wordpress.com/2013/02/06/eddie-martins-speech-to-cabinet-on-30th-january/

2015

Government makes Geological Disposal of Nuclear Waste a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project with exemption from regulatory planning process. A yet-to-be-decided “test of public support” would be limited to the immediate area of the GDF.

https://theecologist.org/2015/apr/02/dump-nuclear-waste-first-they-must-dump-democracy

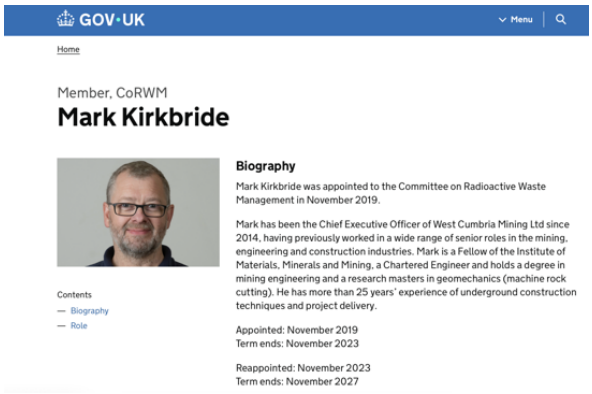


Image: Screenshot from UK Government website, appointment of coal mine developer to nuclear dump committee “Committee on Radioactive Waste Management.”

2019

CEO of West Cumbria Mining (coal mine developer) is appointed to the Government Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (now Nuclear Waste Services).
Mark Kirkbride's brief is "provision of advice (to Government) on activities relating to the continued development of a Geological Disposal Facility safety case," and "GDF siting activities, including selection criteria, methods of investigation, and the timescale for carrying out site selection in the three rock types," and to "advise on new technologies that could be applicable to the development of a GDF including those in the mining and construction sectors and their potential impacts on a GDF programme."
~https://www.change.org/p/sack-cumbrian-coal-mine-boss-from-government-advisor-role-for-nuclear-dump

2022

"Cumbria County Council will cease to exist in May 2023. The government chose the new Unitary boundary to coincide with pro-nuclear councils." ~Dr Kate Willshaw, Friends of the Lake District
https://allerdalecopeland.greenparty.org.uk/2022/01/30/disposal-of-nuclear-waste-in-cumbria/
Geological Disposal Facility "Partnerships" formed, following a vote by a handful of Copeland Councillors: "As part of the search for a suitable site to build a Geological Disposal Facility, the Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership has formed and … has given access to £1million Community Investment Funding per year."
~Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership
https://midcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/three-community-projects-awarded-grant-funding-from-gdf-programme/

"Formation of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership has given access to £1million Community Investment Funding per year from the GDF programme. The project to benefit from this first round of funding was Millom Cricket Club, receiving £31,236 to make improvements to the clubhouse and facilities."
~South Copeland GDF Community Partnership
May 10th 2022
https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/first-projects-in-south-copeland-receive-grant-funding-from-gdf-programme/

"The UK government's Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) is set to carry out seismic surveys off the Cumbrian Coast between July and August this year. They are looking for a place to dispose of the waste produced by Britain's nuclear reactors."
~Charlie Jaay in Euronews.green
https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/06/22/the-uk-is-searching-the-sea-for-a-nuclear-dump-site-and-the-risks-to-marine-life-are-huge
June 2022

Where does our resistance go from here?

The rest of the story is up to all of us.
How clear can we make it to the public that nuclear power is dangerous? How many experts can we provide to prove that nuclear waste stored under the seabed in a highly pressurised hydrogeological environment is a catastrophe waiting to happen?



Image: Demonstration outside Nuclear Dump "Partnership" meeting, 2025

In marketing psychology, it isn't facts that change people's minds. It's the connection to their emotions and their basic needs, and right there, with basic needs, Sellafield and the NDA have West Cumbrians in a choke hold.

The current plans have all the markers of a stitch up. The bypassing of democracy in local councils—indeed, in the make up of the new councils, so cleverly arranged around nuclear acceptance—plus the tsunami of nuclear bribes to smooth the public face of a toxic industry, and all of this accompanied by ever-more nuclear waste arriving in Cumbria. Softened up, opposition ignored, dismissed and discredited, and money to furnish the community's obvious needs—it is a credit to anti-nuclear campaigners that there is any appetite at all at a local level to fight the poison.

But there are some amazing experts out there, prepared to talk to anyone about the dangerous nature of—and the problems with—the plans. There are also some local councillors who care a great deal about both the land they live in and the people around them. We've got the will, even if local government are falling on their knees at the promise of nuclear monies.

The narrow 'test of public support' to decide if the nuclear dump plans will continue doesn't include our neighbours in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man. It excludes anyone not being bribed. We hope that objections will come in from nearby governments to support our reasoned refusal to accept the latest plans for a very deep and extremely hot sub-sea nuclear dump. ……TO BE CONTINUED…….

Note: Radiation Free Lakeland have successfully campaigned on a wide range of issues - they were the first to oppose the now rejected coal mine in Cumbria in 2017 which would have induced seismicity just a few miles from Sellafield, they also successfully campaigned against low level nuclear waste being dumped in a coal mine at Keekle Head, Cumbria.

People can support Radiation Free Lakeland's campaign Lakes Against Nuclear Dump by purchasing a beautiful calendar full of gorgeous photos of the Lake District where the "biggest development ever in the UK" namely a giant, hot sub-sea nuclear dump is planned.

https://lakesagainstnucleardump.com/2027-calendar-for-land/

Fourth referendum in Taiwan on nuclear power in eight years time

Jan van Evert

Taiwan's Central Election Commission (CEC) has approved a referendum on abolishing the government's nuclear-free energy policy. The vote will be held alongside November 28th local elections, when voters will elect city and county leaders, local councillors and other local officials.

The question asked in the referendum will be: "Do you agree that the government should abolish the 'nuclear-free homeland' energy policy to ensure public health, stable electricity supplies and affordable electricity prices, strengthen national defense resilience and support the development of artificial intelligence (AI) industries?" The referendum will need at least 25 per cent of the more than 19 million eligible voters to vote in favour, with supporters exceeding opponents. The proposal's explanatory statement also contains more specific recommendations, such as building large nuclear reactors or SMRs at the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant site.

The energy policy was enshrined in the Basic Environment Act in 2002. It opposes the construction of new nuclear power plants, promotes alternative energy, and calls for the phased shutdown of existing nuclear facilities. The phaseout of nuclear power was completed in May 2025 when the Maanshan Nuclear Power Plant's final reactor was shut down. President Lai Ching-te said on March 21st that, following an assessment by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the No. 2 and No. 3 nuclear power plants had been found to have the conditions necessary for possible restarts, and Taiwan Power Co. (Taipower) was preparing the relevant procedures.

The Taiwan Environmental Protection Union said political parties were abusing the referendum system to promote nuclear energy. The group said the vote will not only not boost Taiwan's economy, but also waste public funds and damage direct democracy. The document informing voters about the referendum will not mention the views of government departments and of social action groups, the environmentalists said. Nor does it explain how nuclear energy provides "affordable electricity prices".

The referendum will be Taiwan's fourth on nuclear power since 2018. In 2018 voters backed removing a legal requirement to end nuclear power generation by 2025. In 2021 a referendum proposing to restart construction and commercial operations at the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant was rejected. And in 2025, another referendum, on extending the operation of the No. 3 nuclear power plant, was backed by 74 per cent of the voters but failed because the number of affirmative votes did not reach the statutory threshold.
Taiwan has three nuclear power plants with a total capacity of 5 GW that once provided about twenty per cent of the island's electricity. The construction of a fourth plant was never finished.

Jan van Evert

Sources:
https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202608280025
https://www.tcn.tw/news/6867258
https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/6430280
Wikipedia

Why China Would Not Allow Russia to Use Nuclear Weapons?

Wen Bo

On July 15, 2026, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi informed Finnish President Alexander Stubb that China would not permit Russia to use nuclear weapons in the Russia-Ukraine war. This statement might have come as a surprise to many, given China's previous policy of appeasement toward Russia since the beginning of the war.

Nevertheless, China's stance on the use of nuclear weapons has remained consistent. In 2022, after Russia ordered its nuclear weapons to be placed on high alert, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that "nuclear wars must not be fought" in order to prevent a nuclear crisis in Eurasia.

China views the use of nuclear weapons by Russia as a significant escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war and maintains that no side can emerge victorious from a nuclear conflict.

The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances and China's Position

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine inherited one-third of its nuclear arsenal, making it the world's third-largest nuclear power. The country also acquired critical design and production methods and tools, as well as 1,700 warheads. In 1994, Ukraine agreed to destroy these weapons and joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on December 5.

On that same day, Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. This document states that the signatories will not use or threaten military force against Ukraine's territorial integrity or political independence.

China did not sign the main document because it was not involved in the negotiations. However, through separate governmental statements, China provided security assurances regarding Ukraine's denuclearization and nonuse of nuclear weapons. In a joint statement signed in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, China pledged "to provide Ukraine with security assurances in the event of an invasion involving nuclear weapons or a threat of nuclear invasion."

In 2014, Russia broke the Budapest agreement by annexing Crimea. China does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea and maintains its official position that Crimea belongs to Ukraine.

Russia's Nuclear Threat Rings a Familiar Bell

Following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, Chinese leader Mao Zedong and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began to have serious ideological disputes. The Soviet Union cut off its assistance to China, including to its nascent nuclear weapons program. Nevertheless, China successfully tested its own nuclear bomb in 1964.

In March 1969, deadly clashes broke out between Soviet and Chinese troops over Zhenbao Island on the Ussuri River. Hardliners in Moscow suggested launching a tactical

nuclear strike against Chinese cities and nuclear targets, including Lop Nur in Xinjiang.

Upon learning of the Soviet plan, President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor, Dr. Henry Kissinger, concluded that a Soviet nuclear attack would be unacceptable. The Nixon administration revealed the Soviet plan by leaking it to the media. In October 1969, meanwhile, the U.S. military conducted Operation Giant Lance, placing its nuclear forces on alert. American strategic bombers carrying nuclear weapons flew toward Soviet airspace to warn Moscow that the U.S. would retaliate if a nuclear weapon were used on China. As a result, the Soviet Union backed down from its nuclear option.

The latest Russia's nuclear threat against Ukraine was reminiscent of the historical crisis, as the Soviet potential nuclear attack on China is still vividly remembered. While the U.S. was seen as a savior in 1969 for preventing a nuclear war with China, China would like to see itself in the U.S.'s position then. This would help restore China's moral standing after its earlier failure to openly condemn Russia's illegal and ill-fated aggression.

Wen Bo founded Greenpeace Beijing office in 2001; and served as China Coordinator for Global Greengrants Fund to support environmental groups in China, Korea and Japan.

Congo exports strategic quantities of uranium to China

Jan van Evert

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is well-known for its large deposits of cobalt, a critical metal used to make lithium-ion batteries for cars, mobile phones and many other devices. But the cobalt ore also contains uranium. Exports of that metal from the DRC are supposed to be banned. Research done by Lighthouse Reports in cooperation with the Financial Times and Nature magazine, reveals that strategic quantities of uranium have been exported to China for many years.

In the past decade, China's nuclear weapons stockpile has doubled to around 600 warheads and is expected to reach a thousand warheads by 2030, according to estimates from the Pentagon. China's known imports and domestic production of uranium do not come close to accounting for the scale of this expansion.

A paper by geologist Ryan Manzuk and nuclear engineer Sébastien Philippe published in Nature Communications, concludes that a range of between 2,000 and 5,000 tons of uranium were exported from the DRC to China between 2000 and 2024. However, much of the cobalt mining industry continues to deny that it has a problem with uranium in the DRC. Although there are strict national and international limits on the safe concentration of uranium present in cobalt exports, there have been a number of contamination incidents throughout the supply chain. Interviews with dozens of industry sources revealed the lack of systematic checks on uranium contamination in the cobalt ore.

A stream of leaked documents from Tenke Fungurume Mining (TFM), one of the largest cobalt mines in the DRC, reinforced the conclusions of the paper by Manzuk and Phiippe. These documents confirmed the production of cobalt samples rich in uranium. Some of these samples contained an amount that is fifteen times the level that should be allowed for export. An important detail is that TFM was acquired by the Chinese company CMOC in 2016.

Steve Muanza, the head of the DRC's nuclear energy agency, said it is "technically possible" and even "likely" that Chinese companies are extracting uranium from cobalt ore exported from the DRC. He said his agency had requested funding to install radiation monitors for trucks leaving the DRC for Zambia.

Sources:
https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/congos-hidden-uranium-exports/

Stalled Horizons: Will Japan Ever Find a Permanent Disposal Site for Its High-Level Radioactive Waste?

Wen Bo

On August 31, 2026, ten local Hitachiomiya residents gathered in front of city hall to protest the selection of Hitachiomiya of Ibaraki Prefecture as a potential nuclear waste storage site. Most of the protesters were senior citizens who demanded that Mayor Sadayuki Suzuki reject the Japanese government's request for a literature survey.

In Japan, a literature survey for a potential high-level radioactive waste repository includes analyzing geological data and studying the area's volcanic and seismic history. This is the first step in a multi-stage, two-decade-long selection process. Currently, Japan does not have a permanent repository of this kind.

Hitachiomiya was identified as the fifth potential site for an initial literature survey. Following the protests from local residents and concerned assembly members, Mayor Sadayuki Suzuki postponed the decision.

Since the first Japanese nuclear reactor began operating in 1966, the country has accumulated thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. Currently, over 2,500 canisters of vitrified waste are being stored temporarily at Rokkasho in Aomori Prefecture and Tokai in Ibaraki Prefecture. As more radioactive waste is generated from reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, the current storage capacity will soon be reached.

In 2002, Japan's Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NUMO) began searching for permanent storage sites, encouraging local municipalities to volunteer. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and NUMO have held over 100 information sessions throughout Japan and offer financial

incentives to willing municipalities. However, only three municipalities have volunteered: Suttsu and Kamoenai in Hokkaido and Genkai in Saga Prefecture.

Both Suttsu and Kamoenai are facing a demographic crisis due to their aging and shrinking populations. The Japanese government provides a two-billion-yen subsidy to participating municipalities for literature surveys. Suttsu used the subsidy to build housing for nurses and other town facilities. With populations of around 2,600 at Suttsu and 800 at Kamoenai, their governments may already be overburdened by budget crises and declining populations.

However, establishing a permanent nuclear waste repository in Hokkaido would damage the island's reputation, as it is renowned for its natural landscapes, agricultural products, and fisheries. Hokkaido Governor Naomichi Suzuki and most Hokkaido residents remain firmly opposed to the idea of establishing a permanent repository on the island.

Suttsu and Kamoenai in Hokkaido and Genkai in Saga Prefecture have one thing in common: they are all close to existing nuclear power plants. Suttsu and Kamoenai are near the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant, and Genkai is adjacent to the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant.

After a literature survey, the second phase will be a preliminary investigation including geological exploration and drilling surveys. The final step in the site selection process is a detailed investigation of the underground geology using test tunnels and other techniques. The subsidy for the second phase is seven billion Japanese yen, while the subsidy for the third phase has yet to be decided.

Although this voluntary system may seem democratic, it is actually both unscientific and inefficient. Local governments can participate in the process in order to receive a substantial subsidy. They could then hope to fail at later stages and still use the subsidy to solve their current financial problems.

Despite the financial incentives, only three places put themselves forward. As a result, the Japanese government identified suitable locations based on various factors, such as earthquake fault lines and the absence of mineral resources, and began inviting local municipalities to participate in the site selection process.

Against this backdrop, the Japanese government asked Minamitorishima, also known as Marcus Island, to conduct a literature survey in March 2026. Though it is administered by Ogasawara Village under Tokyo Metropolis, Minamitorishima is Japan's easternmost island. The tiny coral atoll is located in the Pacific Ocean and is actually 1,950 kilometers away from Tokyo.

In April 2026, Ogasawara Mayor Masaki Shibuya approved the start of a literature survey. However, local residents of Ogasawara archipelago, a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site, expressed intense concerns about the potential destruction of the marine ecosystem. Additionally, the seabed surrounding Minamitorishima contains vast deposits of rare earth minerals, complicating the island's potential use as a nuclear waste repository.

Minamitorishima is isolated from Japan's main islands, but it is actually closer to the Northern Mariana Islands. Neighboring Pacific nations have expressed concerns about having hazardous nuclear waste on the island.

In fact, two other candidates had also previously considered participating in literature surveys. In 2007, Toyo Mayor Yasuoki Tashima of Kochi Prefecture applied for a preliminary literature survey in order to receive a subsidy. However, local residents voted him out in April of that year. The new anti-nuclear mayor of Toyo, Yasutaro Sawayama, withdrew the application. In 2023, local assembly groups in Tsushima, Nagasaki Prefecture, considered a petition to accept a literature survey. However, in September 2023, Tsushima Mayor Naoki Hitakatsu decided not to accept the survey.

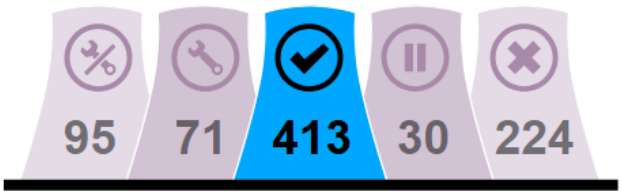
Despite the pervasive and deep-seated NIMBYism among the Japanese populace, the Japanese government appears to be impervious. Instead of decommissioning reactors that had reached the end of their operating lives, in July 2026 the Japanese government revised its nuclear energy policy guidelines and presented specific numerical targets for replacing reactors. The government set a goal to replace up to five nuclear reactors by the 2040s and up to 14 by the 2050s.

On September 14, 2026, an independent investigation committee revealed that Chubu Electric Power, based in Nagoya, had manipulated at least 208 of the 225 earthquake assessments at the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant in Shizuoka Prefecture and had fabricated seismic data since around 2012.

As the nuclear industry scandal continues, the issue of Fukushima's nuclear wastewater remains unresolved, and efforts to find a permanent repository sit stalled, Japan’s nuclear power expansion policy may continue unabated for a while, but not for long.

Wen Bo founded Greenpeace Beijing office in 2001; and served as China Coordinator for Global Greengrants Fund to support environmental groups in China, Korea and Japan.

World Nuclear Power Status



Number of Reactors
(as of August 2026)