

AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY OF MISMANAGING RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Nuclear-free Campaign – Friends of the Earth Australia
www.nuclear.foe.org.au
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"The disposal of radioactive waste in Australia is ill-considered and irresponsible. Whether it is short-lived waste from Commonwealth facilities, long-lived plutonium waste from an atomic bomb test site on Aboriginal land, or reactor waste from Lucas Heights. The government applies double standards to suit its own agenda; there is no consistency, and little evidence of logic." – Nuclear engineer Alan Parkinson

RADIUM HILL: A radioactive waste dump "is not engineered to a standard consistent with current internationally accepted practice" according to a 2003 SA government audit.

PORT PIRIE: The Port Pirie uranium treatment plant is still contaminated over 50 years after its closure. It took a six-year community campaign just to get the site fenced off and to carry out a partial rehabilitation. As of July 2015, the SA government's website states that "a long-term management strategy for the former site" is being developed.

ARKAROOA WILDERNESS SANCTUARY: SA regulators failed to detect Marathon Resource's illegal dumping of low level radioactive waste in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. If not for the detective work of the managers of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, the illegal activities would likely never have been detected. The incident represents a serious failure of SA government regulation. The dishonest 2015-16 SA Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission report dealt with this scandal in two sentences and failed to note that the SA government regulator did not detect the illegal dumping of radioactive waste.

MARALINGA: The 'clean-up' of nuclear waste at the Maralinga nuclear test site in the late 1990s was a fiasco:

- Nuclear engineer Alan Parkinson said of the 'clean-up': "What was done at Maralinga was a cheap and nasty solution that wouldn't be adopted on white-fellas land."

More information:

- Pages 11-15 in Submission to SA Joint Select Committee, www.tinyurl.com/jsc-ngo-sub
- Maralinga 'clean up': www.nuclear.foe.org.au/flawed-clean-up-of-maralinga
- Woomera: www.nuclear.foe.org.au/woomera
- Mismanagement of waste at uranium mines, section 1.11 (p.74): www.tinyurl.com/joint-ngo-RC-sub

- Scientist Dale Timmons said the government's technical report was littered with "gross misinformation".
- Dr Geoff Williams, an officer with the Commonwealth nuclear regulator ARPANSA, said that the 'clean-up' was beset by a "host of indiscretions, short-cuts and cover-ups".
- Nuclear physicist Prof. Peter Johnston noted that there were "very large expenditures and significant hazards resulting from the deficient management of the project".

WOOMERA: CSIRO faces a \$30 million clean-up bill after barrels of radioactive waste at a major facility were found to be "deteriorating rapidly" and possibly leaking. An inspection found "significant rusting" on many of the 9,725 drums.

A damning report of the Woomera facility was issued by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) after an inspection in April 2012. The mixture of water and concentrated radioactive material inside some of the drums also had the potential to produce explosive hydrogen gas, inspectors found.

If there was some honesty about the mismanagement of radioactive waste in Australia, coupled with remediation of contaminated sites, we might have some confidence that lessons have been learned and that radioactive waste will be managed more responsibly in future. But there is no such honesty from the government, and there are no plans to clean up contaminated sites.