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UK plutonium cuts strategy 'in disarray' - scientists



Sellafield nuclear plant has the world's largest store of separated plutonium

The UK's plan to cut its stockpile of separated plutonium is in "disarray", a group of scientists has warned.

The British Pugwash Group (BPG) says the way 100 tonnes of the deadly powder is being stored is "ludicrous".

Its experts fear the stockpile at the Sellafield nuclear site in Cumbria - the largest in the world - could be a target for terrorists.

The government said the plutonium was stored safely and securely but recognised the need to make progress.

'Manifestly ludicrous'

The Department of Energy and Climate Change said it would consider the points raised in a forthcoming consultation.

One of the authors of the BPG report, retired general Sir Hugh Beach, said: "It's a total absurdity that we should have 100 tonnes of separated plutonium sitting up at Sellafield in tin cans... that is manifestly ludicrous."

The report also said the failure of a taxpayer-funded facility to make nuclear fuel from the plutonium was "scandalous".

It said the UK had no policy to deal with the deadly material, which was reclaimed from used nuclear fuel by reprocessing, because there are no UK reactors which can use it.

In malicious hands, the report added, it could help make a "catastrophic" nuclear weapon, and there was also the risk of a 11 September-style attack on stores, causing a radiological release.

The BPG, an international group of scientists and non-proliferation experts, is named after a 1957 conference.