

Hunters Hill residents reject plan to store radioactive waste in their street

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PHOTO: Residents have fought for the removal of the contaminated waste for over 50 years. (Supplied: Decontaminate Hunters Hill)

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A proposal to end a decades-long stoush over radioactive contamination of waterfront properties on Sydney's north shore has been rejected by residents and local council.

Key points:

- The area on Sydney's north shore was the former site of the Radium Hill refinery, which closed in 1915
- Residents have fought for decades to have the Government remove the contaminated soil

- A plan to keep the waste in "cells" on site has been rejected and labelled a "temporary" fix

Several properties on Nelson Parade at Hunters Hill have been built on land contaminated by the former Radium Hill uranium processing plant in the 1900s.

Residents have spent decades urging the government to remove the affected soil, which the NSW Environment Protection Authority found was contaminated with petroleum hydrocarbons, coal tar pitch, arsenic and lead.

The Council has now voted against a recommendation by its own consultants to "encapsulate" the low-level radioactive material in cement "cells" and store it onsite.

Philippa Clark from the Nelson Parade Action Group said residents felt the plan would make their lives worse.

"The cells will make the stigma permanent, our anxiety increased, trapped in unsaleable homes.

"The proposal is silent on all of those impacts.

["They didn't admit that we would be guinea pigs setting Australian precedent for storage of radioactive material in a residential street."](#)

She said most Hunters Hill residents knew nothing of the latest plan by Property NSW as few residents were formally notified and it was on exhibition over the school holidays.

The existence of the radioactive material, in the soil for over a century, was discovered 53 years ago and remains unmanaged.

The Council and residents want the soil removed altogether but an earlier proposal to send it to a waste facility at Kemp's Creek in Sydney's West was abandoned after a backlash from the local community.

There is no other waste facility in the state licenced to handle the material and a national radioactive waste management facility is yet to be established by the Federal Government.

Ms Clarke told Monday night's council meeting that if the radioactive material was stored onsite at Hunters Hill, there was no guarantee it would be moved later when suitable off-site storage becomes available.

Former Hunters Hill mayor Richard Quinn also urged the Council to reject the proposal.

"Whilst we might wish to see progress at last and endorse this [proposal], the onsite encapsulation component of this report I believe cannot be accepted," he said.

"It's contrary to the best practice in sustainable remediation, and it's not unreasonable for this community to expect anything less than best practice."

Resident John Akin thought the Council had no choice but to accept the proposal, saying those pushing for outright rejection "overlook the health risk from the waste being left in its current uncontrolled state".



PHOTO: Rosemary says uranium contamination has caused her family years of stress. (ABC News: Jade Macmillan)

But Mayor Mark Bennett said Property NSW told the Council during a meeting that the majority of Hunters Hill ratepayers were against the encapsulation option.

"It will be interesting to see what the Government decides to do as a result of this ... it's a decision of the Government at the end of the day.

"My opinion is we should not vote for encapsulation because I think it could be a permanent solution without any guarantees that it's an interim solution — I can't support it."

Last year the NSW Government announced \$30 million to fully remediate the land after a parliamentary inquiry a decade ago.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-24/hunters-hill-radioactive-waste-plan-rejected/11339572>