

Hunters Hill Guest Column

Encapsulation not the solution to Nelson Parade contamination

Encapsulation is not the right solution for the Nelson Parade contamination - with all five main studies on it since 2007 rejecting this option for reasons that include the following:

Health risks – there is no precedent here or overseas for encapsulation in a residential street. So, there's no experience to evaluate health risks.

How can we trust safety promises when neighbours have suffered radon gas build up in their home for years from neighbouring government land, which the government has ignored, while the EPA has proven powerless to protect their safety?

Risks associated with radioactive material may be expected to attenuate over thousands of years. What are the operational safety arrangements for radon gas build up, which is being vented only metres from homes?

And there's also the question of maintenance, monitoring and rebuilding of the cell when the concrete decays?

Experts have raised intergenerational concerns – passing the problem to our children's children and to future councils to resolve.

Experts have also said the cost of encapsulation would likely exceed that of excavation and off-site disposal. A technically complex, sloping site and narrow street may potentially also result in water run-off problems.

Experts also anticipate the likelihood of intense community opposition.

Council zoning - this is a residential – how can an industrial, radioactive stor-

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age unit be built in this zone?

If we don't accept encapsulation, what do we want?

There are many options for both permanent and temporary disposal sites.

Primarily we - Nelson Parade Action Group residents - want permanent disposal in the federal facility when it is established.

The first preference of all experts, residents and the community is permanent off-site disposal in a purpose-built, state-of-the-art facility, which is what the National Radioactive Waste Facility will be.

Property NSW told us that they have accepted the Nelson Parade contamination for permanent storage and it has been included in their planning.

Therefore, secondly, we want temporary, off-site storage until completion of the permanent site in approximately ten years.

There are more than 100 temporary storage locations for radioactive waste across Australia, all awaiting completion of the National Radioactive Waste Facility. Surely one could be found for our material.

Temporary storage would involve removal of all contamination off site for sorting and verification and then storage in 'bulka' bags in shipping containers.

Temporary storage has fewer constraints in geology, water management and site selection than permanent storage.

Community benefit

schemes which are successfully used here & in Europe could facilitate location of a suitable site.

So why has the govt chosen the solution of encapsulation and rejected all other options and what criteria have they used for this decision?

Property NSW ignored its Minister's criteria in local media in March - specifically "that the disposal site had to be geologically stable, near a major transport route and not near densely populated areas."

Nelson Parade meets none of these criteria.

Instead, Property NSW has told us the government has given then the criteria to find the solution with the least political pain - political criteria, not environmental criteria.

This is the problem. Property NSW says it consulted with the community and sought residents' feedback.

In reality they used feedback from the few who agreed with them and offered no evidence they'd listened to the rest of us.

We need to stand strong & demand total remediation, informed by environmental best practice, expert advice and policy and not be persuaded into accepting an inappropriate solution, proposed by politicians for non-scientific reasons – with ramifications that will be regretted long into the future.

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