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Evolution of radioactive waste management in France

Within the EU, recycling of waste from nuclear facilities is a common practice used by Member States by implementing “clearance levels” under certain conditions for conventional applications, pursuant to the Directive of December 5, 2013. In France, only one facility, operated by Cyclife, allows the recycling of metallic materials by melting of metal scrap, in the nuclear sector only.

Reutilisation conditions are regulated by the French Public Health Code. Until 2022, its Article R. 1333-3 prohibited the use of materials or waste from nuclear activities, potentially contaminated by radionuclides, in the manufacture of consumer goods and building materials.

While decommissioning of nuclear facilities increases in France, a large volume of very low-level waste (VLLW) will be generated in the next few decades, in particular metal waste.

A public debate held in 2019 in preparation for the 5th issue of national radioactive waste management plan (PNGMDR) confirmed the need to develop new VLLW management solutions. In early 2022, as a result of a process involving all stakeholders, new regulations were issued allowing the recycling of VLL metal waste in the conventional sector.

The paper will provide details on stakeholder engagement regarding the management of VLLW in France, focus on the decision to recycle certain type of VLL metal waste, and on provisions developed to address public expectations regarding VLLW management.

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