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Media release

Search for a site for a deep geological repository

Nagra proposes “Nördlich Lägern” as the site for Switzerland’s deep geological repository

Nördlich Lägern is the safest site for a deep geological repository: here, the rock deep below the surface best confines the radioactive waste for a very long time. Nagra’s investigations demonstrate this. The siting proposal is an important milestone in the project of the century of deep geological disposal.

The National Cooperative for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste (Nagra) proposes Nördlich Lägern as the site for a deep geological repository. Extensive investigations have shown that Nördlich Lägern is the most suitable site and has the largest safety reserves. This is where the quality of the rock is highest and it best encloses the radioactive waste – not only today, but also in the distant future. While the landscape at the earth’s surface will evolve, the deep geological repository will be protected because the rock deep below the surface offers the greatest long-term stability. In addition, Nördlich Lägern has the largest underground area suitable for construction, thus providing the greatest flexibility for the layout of the repository.

The Nördlich Lägern siting region is located in the Zürcher Unterland (lowlands in the northern section of Canton Zürich) in Northern Switzerland. The entrance to the repository, the so-called surface facility, is to be constructed in the Haberstal area in the community of Stadel in Canton Zürich. Nagra designated this site in collaboration with the region and the canton. Nagra plans to construct the encapsulation plants for the waste at the Zwiilag interim storage facility in Würenlingen. As Zwiilag has been in operation for years, this solution offers synergies and ecological advantages.

All siting regions are suitable, but Nördlich Lägern is best

Nagra’s investigations have also shown that it is possible to construct a safe deep geological repository in all three siting regions – Jura Ost, Nördlich Lägern and Zürich Nordost. However, Nördlich Lägern is the safest site.

With this siting proposal, Nagra is revising an earlier assessment. In 2015, Nagra was concerned that, based on the data available at the time, constructing the repository in Nördlich Lägern would be more challenging from an engineering perspective. The Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (ENSI) criticised that these concerns were not sufficiently supported by data. As a result, all three regions were further investigated extensively. The results showed that Nagra’s initial assessment had been too cautious.

After decades of research, the foundation for the project of the century of deep geological disposal has been laid. Nagra will now prepare the general licence applications, which it expects to submit to the Federal Council in 2024. The authorities and the Federal Government will review these applications before the Federal Council and Parliament make their decisions. Should this decision be put to a national referendum, the Swiss voters will

have the final say. Another thirty years or so will pass before Nagra can start waste emplacement operations.

Background information:

A detailed justification of Nagra's siting proposal can be downloaded here: www.nagra.ch.

Nagra will operate an information booth in Stadel from 17th September. Opening hours will be Monday through Friday from 9 am to 7 pm.

Box The Swiss Nuclear Energy Act stipulates that Switzerland's radioactive waste must be disposed of in a deep geological repository. Today, there is broad, international scientific consensus that deep geological disposal is the safest, long-term waste-management solution. In theory, it would be possible to dispose of the waste in two individual repositories located at two separate locations: one repository for low- and intermediate-level waste and one for high-level waste. Instead, Nagra proposes a combined repository that is suitable for all types of radioactive waste. This combined repository is just as safe as two individual repositories, but offers ecological and economic advantages.

Further information: Nagra's Media Office, +41 56 437 12 06, medien@nagra.ch

Nagra is conducting research so that Switzerland can safely dispose of its radioactive waste. By constructing a deep geological repository, we can press ahead with a project of the century that will benefit the whole of Switzerland by protecting the environment and future generations. Our 130 employees are committed to achieving this goal and dedicate their scientific and technological expertise and seek dialogue with the public. The National Cooperative for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste (Nagra) was founded in 1972 by the operators of the nuclear power plants and the Federal Government and has its headquarters in Wetingen, Canton Aargau.