

Closed consultation: Domestic Private Rented Sector minimum level of energy efficiency

Updated: Added summary of responses.

We're seeking views on the government's proposal to amend the domestic Minimum Level of Energy Efficiency Regulations to introduce a capped landlord financial contribution element.

This proposal is designed to future-proof the regulations and make them as effective as possible, while protecting landlords against excessive cost burdens. With a cost-cap, domestic landlords would only need to see investment in improvements to an EPC F or G rated property up to the value of that cap. The government's preferred cap level is £2,500 per property. A range of additional, alternative, cap options are set out in the consultation and the associated consultation impact assessment.

The consultation is intended for all interested parties including landlords and tenants, local government, energy suppliers, energy assessors, small and large businesses, consumers, and the general public.

National Statistics: Pesticide usage survey: soft fruit in the United Kingdom, 2016

Data on pesticide usage during the 2015 to 2016 growing season on soft fruit crops.

This report is published on the Health and Safety Executive website.

News story: Sellafield's 'locked

vault' is ready to be emptied

The holes will allow radioactive waste to be removed from one of the site's most hazardous buildings.

Six giant steel doors now provide a safe barrier between the outside world and the waste inside the silo, until it starts to be removed by a 'grabbing' machine.

Sellafield's 'locked vault' is ready to be emptied

The Pile Fuel Cladding Silo was built in the 1950s when the site's purpose was to make material for nuclear weapons.

Safely decommissioning the building is one of the highest priorities for Sellafield Ltd and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Getting access to the waste inside has been one of the most complex engineering challenges in the site's history.

Head of the PFCS programme Steven Carroll said:

It's an early Christmas present to complete the work three months early and under budget. We can now say 'the silo is ready for retrievals' for the first ever time.

Getting access to this nuclear waste store which was built with no thought to how it would be emptied has been an incredible engineering challenge, involving years of planning and preparation, hundreds of dedicated people and many millions pounds of investment.

It's also involved a massive team effort with our main contractor partner Bechtel Cavendish Nuclear Solutions and businesses such as James Fisher Nuclear and Shepley Engineers.

Reaching this landmark allows us to fully focus next year on manufacturing and installing all of the equipment which will reach in, retrieve the waste and allow it to be safely exported to the new facility for safer storage.

The level of challenge involved with this facility is unparalleled, considering the age of the building, the lack of historical information about the waste itself, the atmosphere inside the silo and its position on one of the most congested sites, anywhere in the world.

Each section of concrete has been cut away in a single piece (known as the monolith) and withdrawn into a containment bag. Six containment doors (already installed on all compartments) is then lowered over the apertures

and closed.

To remove the waste, a crane will extend through the cut holes, a grabber will then drop down to scoop the waste up, lifting it out of the container and back through the hole.

It will then be dropped into a specially-designed metal box, for safe and secure storage in a modern facility.

As the first ever breaking of the structure since it was built, this takes Europe's most complex nuclear site a step closer to reducing the UK's nuclear hazard.

News story: Tyne and Wear man fined for waste offences

Jonathan Patrick Finn of Flaxtead Grange, Sunderland Road, Newbottle, was charged with illegally storing and treating mixed waste when he appeared before South Tyneside Magistrates' Court on 12 December 2017.

He admitted the charges brought by the Environment Agency and was handed a £200 fine with £1,530 costs.

The court heard how Finn leased a dead end area of land adjacent to the railway line on the north side of Sheepfolds Road, Sunderland, in January 2016.

The land had previously been fly tipped and Finn was offered six months' rent free and £3,000 in return for lawfully disposing of the waste. Instead, Finn added to it.

Between 4 and 8 January 2016, CCTV captured a red flat back lorry laden with waste approaching the site. Footage then shows the lorry, owned by Finn's father and being used by Finn at the time, leaving empty a short time later. On 4 January a fire was also photographed on the site.

When Environment Agency officers visited the site on 2 February 2016 they saw around five tonnes of waste, including construction waste, plastics and timber on the road outside. Inside they saw large amounts of mixed waste including household waste, sofas and plastics.

The court heard that Environment Agency officers visited the site twice more between 23 February and 24 March 2016, each time reporting an increase in waste.

Further photographic evidence taken during this time shows four loads of waste deposited on the back of a lorry registered in Finn's name.

In May 2016, the land owner was given four weeks to clear the waste after Environment Officers were informed that Finn had abandoned the site.

On a subsequent visit they discovered that the waste was being cleared to a site at the Pallion Industrial Estate in Sunderland owned by Finn's father, John Finn, who later confirmed that some of the waste had come from the Sheepfolds Road site.

Finn attended an interview on 17 October 2016 during which he admitted to burning waste and operating a waste recycling business without a permit.

Rachael Caldwell from the Environment Agency said:

Environmental laws are there to protect communities and the environment from pollution.

Anyone who operates outside of these laws is not only breaking them but is more likely to commit greater harm, which is why we will pursue them and, where repeated or significant breaches are found, we will prosecute.

A trial involving another defendant allegedly linked to the illegal storing and treatment of waste on the site is set to take place next year.

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