

Decommissioning Civil Nuclear Sites Will Take 120 Years, MPs Warn

By [Engineering and Technology](#)

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According to a report from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC), decommissioning the UK's civil nuclear sites will cost £132bn of public money, and will not be completed for a further 120 years.

[The report](#) blamed a “sorry saga” of failed contracts, poor government oversight, and “perpetual” lack of knowledge of the state of civil nuclear sites. It said that decommissioning of retired nuclear power stations had been an “afterthought” when the UK’s nuclear industry was established.

This has led to decades of poor record-keeping about the conditions and locations of hazardous materials, the report said, leaving the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) with a legacy of knowledge gaps about the condition of sites it is responsible for ensuring are safe. The NDA acknowledged that it still does not have a complete understanding of the 17 sites across its estate, including the 10 former Magnox power stations.

“The UK went from leading the world in establishing nuclear power to this sorry saga of a perpetual lack of knowledge about the current state of the UK’s nuclear sites,” said Meg Hiller, chair of the PAC. “With a project of this length and cost we need to see clearer discipline in project management.”

In 2018, the PAC condemned the NDA for having “dramatically underestimated” costs with regards to the Magnox procurement and original contract, with lack of knowledge a major factor in this failure. It estimates that the cost of getting Magnox sites to the “care and maintenance” stage of decommissioning has increased by £1.3-3.1bn since 2017 to £6.9-8.7bn today; the PAC warned that costs may increase further. The timetable for completing this work is uncertain, with a current estimate of 12-15 years.

According to the NDA’s most recent estimates, the cost of decommissioning the UK’s civil nuclear sites will cost current and future generations of taxpayers £132bn and take another 120 years to complete.

The PAC said that the NDA had not done enough to harness technical skills and new technologies in the nuclear industry.

Deputy chair Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown added:

“Although progress has been made since our last report, incredibly, the NDA still doesn’t know even where we’re currently at, in terms of state and safety of the UK’s disused nuclear sites. The NDA, with stronger, better oversight from government, must make a clear break with the incompetence and failures of the past and step up to maximise these assets and the astronomical sums of taxpayers’ money it has absorbed.”

An NDA spokesperson said:

“We welcome the [PAC]’s report and the scrutiny it brings on our work to provide value for money for the taxpayer. We are pleased that the committee recognises the inherent uncertainties and challenges involved in our mission to clean up 17 of the UK’s oldest nuclear sites and the progress being made. This includes increased learning on our sites, their facilities, and the nature of the waste within them.

“Safety is our priority and we do not accept the committee’s suggestions that we may not understand the safety of our sites. Our work is tightly and independently regulated to ensure we uphold the highest standards of safety.

“Our focus remains on ensuring that we deliver this work of national strategic importance safely, effectively, and efficiently. We will be looking carefully at the PAC’s recommendations.”

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