

Recycling of rare earth waste ready, says Lynas
The Malaysian Insider
April 19, 2012
By Shannon Teoh

KUANTAN, APRIL 19 —Plans to recycle waste with low-level radiation from its controversial rare earth plant here into non-hazardous commercial products are ready, Lynas Corp said today.

This would mean the Australian miner will not need a permanent depository facility (PDF), although Putrajaya has insisted on the additional requirement that the Sydney-based firm says is only needed in a "worst-case scenario" where it is unable to process the waste.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had announced last month Lynas must find a safe disposal site away from the Gebeng industrial zone or anywhere that could damage the environment.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai also suggested Lynas return its waste to its mine in Australia but the Western Australian government has said it is illegal to import any mining residue, whether or not it is radioactive.

Datuk Mashal Ahmad, managing director for Lynas' local operations here, told a media briefing today that research and development to reprocess water leach purification (WLP) residue into materials for road-building has been successful.

"But we cannot submit to the authorities for approval yet because we have to do it with actual residue from our plant. The technology is proven and it is nothing new but you have to change it for your own residue," he said.

Local regulators Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) had said in January it would approve a TOL subject to added conditions including identifying a suitable long-term waste disposal site.

Lynas had said last month that identifying this site "is a work in progress."

Lynas Malaysia had said prior to AELB's decision that a PDF will only be needed in a "worst-case scenario" where it is unable to reprocess the waste into a commercial product.

Local residents and environmentalists have criticised Lynas Corp for not having a long-term waste management plan and claimed the company would store radioactive waste onsite, which is about two kilometres from the nearest residential area.

But Lynas Malaysia managing director Datuk Mashal Ahmad told The Malaysian Insider in January "we are working on commercial applications and coming to the conclusion. Once we find all this, we can even forget about a RSF."

He said the PDF only came about during the review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in June which was ordered by the government.

According to Lynas, refining rare earth ore from Mount Weld, West Australia will result in three forms of residue, two of which have a radiation level of below 1 Becquerel per gramme (Bq/g) which is considered non-radioactive and outside of regulatory control by both international and local authorities.

Professor Ismail Bahari, the company's radiological safety adviser, had said that the process for the WLP can dilute radioactivity to below 1 Bq/g.

Mashal added in the interview in January that Lynas was serious about reusing its waste commercially as it had spent RM750,000 to produce 40 kg of residue from its pilot plant for the sake of research.

"We spent three quarters of a million just to make rubbish. Why? Because we are proactive and we are already able to bring it below 1 Bq/g and come out of regulatory control," he said.

Lynas has faced fierce protests from local residents and opposition politicians who say that the plant will cause radiation pollution despite the Sydney-based firm insisting it has met and exceeded local and international safety standards.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/recycling-of-rare-earth-waste-ready-says-lynas/>