

Geologists warn that a nuclear dump at Sellafield could cost up to £10bn

By CRAIG WATSON

SENIOR geologists at Glasgow University warned yesterday that the cost of developing a nuclear dump at Sellafield could add up to £10bn, the same as building the Channel Tunnel.

Dr Stuart Haszeldine, senior geology lecturer, and professor of geophysics David Smythe are to publish a book this week cataloguing the case against the plans.

Dr Haszeldine said: "It is clear from this evidence that many independent scientists think this is the wrong place for a dump and the wrong way to investigate it.

"The geology is too complex and no amount of extra investigation is going to change that. I'm not against disposing of waste underground but this

looks like the wrong place to do it.

"Now is the time to look for a better place. Britain could waste the cost of the Channel Tunnel on this."

He said the developers, UK Nirex, had already spent almost £400m investigating the possibility of using the Cumbria site as a nuclear dump and planned to spend a further £300m digging exploratory tunnels.

He claimed the final development costs would rise to at least £3000m but, like the Channel Tunnel, could spiral beyond all expectations.

Dr Haszeldine said the new book, Radioactive waste disposal at Sellafield UK, brought together evidence from the local planning inquiry into the proposals. The inquiry ended in February and its findings are not yet known. The local county council

has already rejected the scheme.

However, Dr Haszeldine said there were several problems with the site, such as the flow of water through the proposed dumping ground and the possibility of earthquakes in the region.

He said it was possible that the Sellafield plans would go ahead because so much money had spent on development work.

He added that the book would help to raise public awareness and debate on the issue, and may be used to inform this week's discussions at the annual meeting of UK Nirex and the Government's watchdog, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee.

Co-author Professor Smythe said he had carried out a major site survey at Sellafield.

He added: "I did give my full support to the Nirex project at Sellafield. However, I was forced

to change my mind when I saw how Nirex management was using the information politically."

Mrs Lorraine Mann, of the Scotland Against Nuclear Dumping group, warned that strengthening the case against Sellafield could refocus attention on Dounreay as a possible dumping ground.

She said: "The nuclear industry has always said that, should Sellafield prove unsatisfactory, then Dounreay would be their second choice."

Under the Nirex proposals, Sellafield would be used to store intermediate-level, rather than low-level, nuclear waste. There are currently no such repositories in the world.

UK Nirex, which is funded by the nuclear industry, was not available for comment yesterday.