

Laboratory is a research facility

Sir, - Whether we like it or not, radioactive waste exists. There is enough intermediate waste to cover a football pitch to a depth of about 30ft, and some of that waste is to be found in Scotland at Chapelcross, Dounreay, Faslane, Hunterston, Rosyth and Torness. Nirex's task is to find a safe way to dispose of this waste.

If we cannot show that the site we are investigating at Sellafield for a deep underground repository is safe, we will not seek to dispose of it there and would look elsewhere.

Yet, Professor David Smythe (Letters, 3 December) persists in demeaning an important scientific debate about the promise of the Sellafield site and the role of our rock laboratory, which is not a nuclear facility but a research facility for further investigation of the geology.

A 66-day public inquiry heard evidence from 73 witnesses, including Professor Smythe. It is simply nonsense to say that the evidence of Friends of the Earth (for whom he was a witness) and Greenpeace went "unchallenged". It did not, as some 800 pages of evidence and also days of cross-examinations showed.

As the next step in the procedure laid down by law, we at Nirex are content to let the inquiry in-

spector judge the strength of the various cases made. If we do get permission for the rock laboratory, and subsequently demonstrate that the site is suitable for radioactive waste disposal, there will then be a *further* public enquiry where all these scientific issues can be openly debated.

Taryn Rock

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Sir, - Nirex denies that escaping radioactive gases will reach dangerous levels at the Earth's surface in only 20 to 40 years from date of burial (your report, 2 December).

A spokesman says that "the waste canisters would last (at least) 1,000 years". This may be true, but what he does not tell us is that the canisters will each be equipped with a gas vent, because otherwise they would explode.

Escape of gas, therefore, is deliberate, unavoidable, and starts on day 1 of burial.

We have shown, using Nirex's own previously secret data, that this gas gets to the surface within one generation at concentrations far exceeding those permitted by current safety regulations.

The spokesman seems to have unwittingly corroborated our oth-

er claim that the cover-up culture is alive and well within the nuclear waste disposal industry.

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