

Ref: FOI2026-024

20 May 2026

We refer to your request for the following information:

"Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I am writing to request information regarding inventories of the rare helium isotope helium-3 and associated noble gas stocks held within your estate.

Specifically, I am seeking data on gases that have been separated from active tritium or are otherwise free of tritium contamination.

Please provide the following information:

1. *Separated Helium-3 Inventories: The total volume/mass of stored Helium-3 gas currently held across your sites that is not mixed with active tritium.*
2. *Off-spec/recovered noble gases: Inventories of any "off-spec", contaminated, or recovered noble gas stocks originating from tritium handling, storage, or decay processes, which have subsequently been purged of tritium (e.g., contaminated with helium-4, nitrogen, or air, but safe for non-radiological handling)*
3. *Data on the Stocks: For the materials identified in points 1 and 2, please provide:*
 - *The current storage locations (e.g., specific facility or site name).*
 - *The known purity levels or contaminant profiles of these gases.*
4. *Strategic Management: Any internal assessments, policy documents, or correspondence from the last ten years relating to the potential commercial sale, disposal, or strategic retention of these non-tritium helium-3 stocks.*

I am explicitly not requesting information regarding active tritium stocks, weapons-grade materials, or mixed helium-3/tritium storage currently subject to national security or high-level radiological handling protocols. My inquiry is strictly limited to legacy, separated, or "waste" noble gas stocks that pose no radiological hazard.

If my request is too broad or likely to exceed the statutory cost limit, please contact me so that I may refine it. If any part of this request is exempt from disclosure, please provide the non-exempt information and cite the specific exemption being applied to the rest.

I would prefer to receive this information electronically in a standard format (e.g., PDF or Excel) via return email."

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

We can advise that whilst AWE may hold some information in scope of the subjects you have requested, we will not be able to answer your request without exceeding the appropriate limit set out at Section 12 of the Act.

Section 12 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with these would exceed the appropriate limit, which for public authorities is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 2.25 working days in determining whether the department holds the information, locating, retrieving and extracting it.

Specifically, to identify and extract the information requested in question 4 of your request, AWE would be required to review 10 years of documentation review (including correspondence). This would take around 61 hours of staff time to complete. Where section 12 applies to one part of a request we refuse all of the request under the cost limit as advised by the Information Commissioner's Office.

If you refine your request so it is more likely to fall under the cost limit, we will consider it again. In particular, the work required to address items 1, 2 and 3 is likely to fall within the cost threshold and could therefore be progressed in their current form.

However, item 4 is considerably broader in scope. This is due to both the extended time period covered and the wide range of information sources that would need to be searched.

To assist you in refining your request, you may wish to consider:

- Narrowing the timeframe to a more specific and limited period; and/or
- Reducing the number or type of information sources to be searched.

Please note that if you break your request down into several smaller requests, we may still consider that your requests fall under the cost limit in their entirety.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to information.requests@awe.co.uk or our postal address: Information Requests Team, AWE Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4PR. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team