



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 22nd April 2014

NFLA concern over Drigg climate change report of future radiation leakage – where is the concept of intergenerational equity and what about other nuclear sites?

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) is concerned to read the detail of an Environment Agency (EA) report that outlines that the Low Level Waste Repository (LLWR) near Drigg in Cumbria is 'virtually certain' to be eroded by rising sea levels and to contaminate the Cumbrian coast with large amounts of radioactive waste, as the potential effects of climate change impact on the English coastline over the next few hundred years.

The report, outlined in *The Guardian* on Monday, notes a remarkable statement from the EA - "It is doubtful whether the location of the LLWR site would be chosen for a new facility for near-surface radioactive waste disposal if the choice were being made now". (1)

The NFLA accepts that the effects of climate change may not make the site dangerous to leakage in the near future, but it is concerned that the EA appear to be downplaying the concept of intergenerational equity – the waste was created over the past 60 years and it is our responsibility to clean it up and make it safe for many sets of future generations. Aerial photographs of the Drigg site show how close to the shoreline it is and its location is another example of the lack of long-term thinking that has been present in the 60 year history of the UK nuclear industry.

A wider issue of concern to the NFLA is the amount of radioactive particles regularly being found on the beaches of the UK coastline – whether it is the thousands of small particles found on the beaches close to the Sellafield and Dounreay sites or it is military nuclear waste as found on the shore at Dalgety Bay in Fife. Though a fierce scientific debate exists over the potential health effects of exposure to such low levels of radiation, independent radiation scientist Dr Ian Fairlie has noted that over 60 studies, including four recent international studies, show a 37% increase in childhood leukaemia near nuclear power stations. (2)

The NFLA has also noted previously a 2012 DEFRA report assessing the climate change risk to nuclear sites in the UK. This noted that 12 of the 19 civil nuclear reactors in the UK are at risk of serious flooding and coastal erosion due to the likely future impact of climate change. (3) Just last month it emerged that the Dungeness nuclear reactor in Kent was quietly shut down for five months in 2013 over serious concerns about whether its sea defences could survive a severe flood incident and endure a Fukushima-type water inundation. (4)

The NFLA calls on the EA to carefully consider whether it should permit future radioactive waste being stored at Drigg. It is also calling on it and the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) to review its regulation of waste sites in the UK at this Thursday's ONR NGO Forum taking place in London, in the wake of such long-term climate change reports.

The NFLA also believe climate change studies are critical for considering the location of a future store for higher and intermediate level radioactive waste. This should be a key factor in whether West Cumbria is really a suitable location for a deep underground radioactive waste repository, or whether other sites should be considered. It is also critical for determining whether deep underground sites are the sensible policy for the storage of radioactive waste – a matter of consistent concern for the NFLA.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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NFLA Steering Committee Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“I am alarmed to read of the future inappropriateness of the low level waste repository near Drigg, should climate change be as damaging as is feared. With other UK civil nuclear sites, and new nuclear sites, also under threat from long-term climate change and coastal erosion it confirms to me the pressing need to move away from nuclear power to renewable energy alternatives. I do not want future generations to have to clear up the radioactive mess that we have generated.”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Guardian, 20th April 20th 2014 - <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/20/choice-cumbria-nuclear-dump-mistake-environment-agency>
- (2) New Nuclear Monitor 35, giving information on its submission to DECC on the ABWR justification process - http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/nuclearmonitor/NFLA_New_Nuclear_Monitor_No35.pdf
- (3) The Guardian, 7th March 2012 – <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/mar/07/uk-nuclear-risk-flooding>. A map of affected sites is also available at the web link – <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/graphic/2012/mar/07/uk-nuclear-sites-flooding-map>
- (4) Independent 18th March 2014 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/exclusive-dungeness-nuclear-power-station-quietly-taken-offline-for-five-months-over-fears-of-fukushimastyle-flood-disaster-9200494.html>

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