



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 19th March 2014

Incidents at Dungeness and other sites – why does there remain such a lack of openness and transparency in the nuclear industry?

The NFLA is alarmed and concerned to hear of another serious nuclear safety incident that has been seemingly understated for some considerable time. It calls for an urgent review into wider openness and transparency in the nuclear industry.

In an exclusive article published in today's *Independent*, it has 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. (1)

EDF closed the reactor on May 22nd 2013 and alerted the Office for Nuclear Regulation of the need for urgent repairs of the sea walls around the site to prevent it being inundated by water. The reactor only reopened on October 15th 2013. Only brief and fairly vague media statements were published by EDF in explaining the reasons for the outage.

The NFLA fully agrees with the comments made in *'The Independent'* by Professor Steve Thomas that a reactor closure for five months is not just a trifling matter; it is endemic of a far more serious safety occurrence. The NFLA welcomes the importance given to safety by EDF and the nuclear reactor, but this incident is another example of not adequately informing the public about important nuclear safety matters.

NFLA also notes a recent report by the Middlesex University Flood Hazard Research Centre FOR Greenpeace UK that looked at the effect of expected sea level rises and increases in storm surge over the next 200 years at Dungeness, Hinkley Point, Bradwell and Sizewell. Of these sites Dungeness appears to be highly threatened. Bradwell is under significant threat and Hinkley Point is also vulnerable. The situation at Sizewell is less clear. The fact that three out of the four stations examined are currently actively defended to protect against flooding or erosion must be considered a clear warning signal as to the long-term future of new nuclear build at the sites. (2)

In recent months a number of other incidents highlight a general lack of openness and transparency in nuclear safety issues, including:

- The UK Defence Minister Philip Hammond admitting an increase in radioactivity levels at the Vulcan test reactor in Dounreay had been detected two years ago, but neither the UK Parliament nor the Scottish Government was informed until a few days ago. (3)
- The extent of a leak on the nuclear submarine HMS Tireless last year still remains unclear, despite attempts by MPs and groups like the NFLA to find out more about the incident. (4) Just a few days ago the submarine was refused access to ports in the United Arab Emirates, requiring a 2,000 mile detour to India, with the Ministry of Defence refusing to explain why. (5)
- The reasons for closing parts of the Sellafield site after radiation alarms were unclear for some considerable time. The incident led to severe local traffic congestion amidst confusion as to whether the site was closed or not, which could have created serious access issues for emergency services if it had been a full scale emergency. (6)

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I congratulate *'The Independent'* for bringing to light the reasons for a five month closure of the Dungeness nuclear site in Kent. Given one of the wettest winters since records began, the serious

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threat of a sea wall around a nuclear site being potentially breached by flooding has to be of concern to the public. I remember the terrible scenes in Fukushima just three years ago and it is chilling to think what may have happened if the sea walls at Dungeness not been fixed. This incident shows the ongoing vulnerability of coastal nuclear sites in an era when climate change is bringing more severe weather to the UK. The incident also provides another example of where the public appears to be kept in the dark over significant nuclear safety incidents. I call on the Government, the nuclear regulators and the nuclear industry to review its communications and promote an improved culture of openness and transparency. I for one believe the current system is not fit for purpose.”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) 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>
- (2) Report developed by Middlesex University for Greenpeace
<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/files/pdfs/nuclear/8179.pdf>
- (3) BBC News Online, 6th March <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-26463923>
- (4) See NFLA Policy Briefing 109, 17th April 2013
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A223_\(NB109\)_HMS_Tireless_leak.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A223_(NB109)_HMS_Tireless_leak.pdf)
- (5) Daily Mail 17th March 2014
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2582929/Why-did-United-Arab-Emirates-refuse-let-British-nuclear-submarine-dock-fury-crews-families-India-them.html>
- (6) BBC News Online, 31st January 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-25975785>

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