



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 28th June 2011

NFLA All Ireland Forum states its opposition to the building of new nuclear reactors in the UK. It urges the Irish Government to be more proactive in challenging the risks of new nuclear from the UK.

The Nuclear Free Local (NFLA) All Ireland Forum asserts today its opposition to the UK Government's decision to proceed with the building of 8 new nuclear power station sites in advance of the results of European wide nuclear stress tests. NFLA All Ireland Forum Co-Chair Councillor Ollan Herr describes it as an act of 'thoughtless arrogance' to be continuing with the development of such sites as well when the final outcome of the UK nuclear safety review is also not known.

In March this year, leaders of the 27 EU member states agreed at an energy summit that inspection measures at the 146 nuclear plants within the bloc would be stepped up to include additional accident scenarios. In addition tests would be conducted to consider electricity supplies like those that failed at Fukushima, cooling systems and additional aspects like terrorist attacks, human error or the plants' ability to function safely during unexpected emergency situations (1).

The public are now well aware of the recent nuclear accident in Fukushima as well as the legacy and continuing threat of Chernobyl, yet Irish NFLA members see little evidence of caution or of any careful consideration of the various nuclear risks by the UK Government. The issue of an aircraft crashing into the high level waste tanks at Sellafield remains. The release of caesium 137 from the Chernobyl accident is estimated at 30 kg, but Sellafield's high level waste tanks contain **2,100 kg** of the material (2). The implications of a radioactive release of this magnitude, carried by easterly winds to Ireland, are truly frightening. The NFLA All Ireland Forum believes spokespeople from the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) are irrational in their risk assessment that an Irish population would still be safe or unthreatened by such an event. In the view of NFLA All-Ireland Forum members, it is irresponsible to continue to play down the risks to Irish people from a Fukushima or Chernobyl scale accident in Wales, England or Scotland.

Aside from the big accidents, Sellafield has for years been beset with continuous operational and technical difficulties. Probably the worst incident occurred in 2005 when a leak on a pipe released 20 tonnes of plutonium and uranium as mixed liquor with nitric acid. This leak was thankfully contained but its significance is that it had remained undetected for **9 months** and that the quantity of toxic material was so large. More recently, in May 2009, another example of negligence occurred when a further pipe leak was discovered. A steady drip from a faulty flange had revealed that radioactivity had been leaking from a pipe at Sellafield for **14 months** before it was discovered. The radioactivity came from an overhead ventilation duct. It was carrying water vapour from the Magnox reprocessing plant for dilution before authorised discharge to the sea (3).

These "authorised" discharges to the sea remain worrying to the NFLA. The new generation nuclear power plants will still be "authorised" to discharge radioactive elements such as tritium, carbon 14, iodine, cobalt 60, plutonium 241 as well as caesium 137 to the marine environment (4). The NFLA remain convinced that much more detailed research is required around potential links between low levels of radiation in the environment and human health. The numbers of clusters of ill health in children around German nuclear power stations was certainly a factor in Germany's decision to close its remaining plants. Similarly leukaemia and other cancer clusters have been discovered at English nuclear plant locations such as near Hinkley Point, Sellafield itself, as well as populated areas of the North Wales Coast, and near Dounreay in the Scottish Highlands (5).

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It is likewise a real concern to the NFLA All Ireland Forum that Minister Phil Hogan has to date failed to respond to letters requesting a meeting with us and to consider speaking on this issue at its forthcoming meeting in Wexford in September. In the context of the Fukushima disaster what is Ireland's position on this issue? A spokeswoman for Minister Hogan claims that: "Ultimately it is a matter for the UK to decide on their energy policy" (6). In the context of the potential Fukushima scale disaster this is not acceptable to Irish Councils. It is the responsibility of the Irish State to protect the health and well being of its citizens, particularly where the establishment of a known toxic emitting source is preventable or avoidable. The opportunities for new renewable energy policies on these two islands are beyond doubt and co-operation should continue to be enhanced.

NFLA All Ireland Forum Co Chair and Dundalk Town Councillor, Ollan Herr, comments: "The previous 11 year legal battle by the four County Louth plaintiffs (including myself), against the Irish State and British Nuclear Fuels Limited, was in part motivated at the time by the concern that Irish people were being exposed to health risks and that Ireland was not at the time actively protecting the health of Irish citizens. My real concern is that a similar situation may be emerging again."

Councillor Herr added: "We know that the private Japanese power company that was running the Fukushima Nuclear Plant is unable to carry the cost of compensation to the tens of thousands of people who have had to leave their homes in the 20 km evacuation zone. We also know that it will be the Japanese tax payer and not the private sector that will cover the insurance and liability costs. Minister Hogan needs to ask his Ministerial colleagues in London the following question and give an answer to the Irish public: which authority or corporate body will compensate Irish people who are ill or who are forced to abandon their homes, probably for ever, as a result of radioactive emissions from a nuclear facility in England or Wales? Will it be the private nuclear power company, the UK tax payer or the Irish tax payer?"

Ends. For interviews with NFLA All Ireland Forum Co Chair, Councillor Ollan Herr, contact him on (00 353) 861700569. Further information from the NFLA Secretariat – (00 44) (0)161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

- (1) To find out more about the EU stress tests go to:
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/11/339&format=HTML>
- (2) Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, UK radioactive waste inventory, April 2010.
<http://www.nda.gov.uk/ukinventory>
- (3) See the 'No2Nuclear Power.org.uk' website for further details of the incidents.
- (4) NFLA 'New Nuclear Monitor 22', Concerns over aquatic discharges into the Irish Sea from proposed new nuclear reactors, December 2010:
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/nuclearmonitor/NFLA_New_Nuclear_Monitor_No22.pdf
- (5) NFLA Policy Briefing 82, COMARE 14th Annual Report on low level radiation and health – a critical analysis by Dr Ian Fairlie, May 2011
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A196_\(NB82\)_COMARE_report.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A196_(NB82)_COMARE_report.pdf)
- (6) Irish Times, 24th June 2011.
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2011/0624/1224299526522.html>

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