



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

**NFLA response to Governments consultation on strategy to deal with naturally occurring radioactive materials - barriers should not be removed to permit new industries to create new waste streams.**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publishes today its model response for member local authorities to respond to the UK and Devolved Governments (in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) draft strategy for the management of 'naturally occurring radioactive materials' (NORM) waste across the country. (1)

The consultation has been developed jointly by the UK, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Government's. Its aim is to 'facilitate the sustainable and efficient management of Low Level Radioactive Waste in line with the waste hierarchy. This requires a policy framework which enables and encourages waste producers to avoid the production of unnecessary waste, and to manage arisings in the most environmentally appropriate way'. This consultation seeks to provide a framework for dealing with solid, liquid and gaseous waste from industrial processes which generate NORM waste.

In the NFLA's view, 'natural' background radiation is not safe. (3) In the UK it has been estimated that it causes, on average, about 6,000 to 7,000 future cancer deaths per year. (4) Consequently when naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM) are concentrated through industrial activities, they need to be treated with extreme caution.

The NFLA has difficulty with the Governments' application of the waste hierarchy to nuclear waste management, preferring instead to rely on a clear set of environmental principles. The use of the waste hierarchy tends to be used to promote 'recycling' or other forms of waste management, such as incineration, which can result in dilution and dispersal of radioactive substances, rather than its concentration and containment.

Where NFLA does agree with the waste hierarchy is on the policy of waste prevention and waste minimisation. However, NFLA believes this should be applied more rigorously than simply just "...encouraging waste producers to avoid the production of unnecessary waste ..."

In the NFLA's view, the whole ethos behind this consultation appears to be to create a framework which removes barriers to the growth of industries – particularly the exploitation of onshore unconventional oil and gas - which create NORM waste, meaning that although more efficient waste management practices may be promoted, the overall quantity of waste produced will be increased, and ultimately an increased risk to health. Instead, NFLA argues the Governments' should be asking whether these new activities which produce emissions of radioactive substances into the environment are justified, and can show that the benefits outweigh the potential health risks. If there are alternative ways of producing the same outcome e.g. providing our energy needs, without harmful radioactive emissions, then the NFLA argues the Governments' should be asking whether it wants these industries to grow at all.

To give an idea of the scale of this problem, Dart Energy is proposing to discharge a total of 1.68 GBq (billion Becquerels) per year via produced water in outflow streams and pipelines into the river Forth from its proposed Coal Bed Methane extraction at Airth near Falkirk. This would be about **three times the level of radioactivity discharged into the Forth by Rosyth Dockyard in 2012**. So it is a relatively large amount of radioactivity. Such levels of radioactive contamination would be a high price

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to pay for the methane gas produced. The NFLA believes that the question the Governments' should be asking is whether it is really necessary to do this. Are there alternative and more environmentally sensitive ways of satisfying energy needs in the UK? In the NFLA's view there are – a combination of a wide renewable energy mix, a concerted local authority led energy efficiency programme and the development of community-orientated microgeneration projects.

Within the consultation, mention is made of the European Commission's recommendation that a higher level of human exposure should be allowed from NORM waste in comparison to anthropogenic (or industry made) sources of radiation. The Commission cites the ubiquity and variability of background radiation as the reason for a higher exposure limit for NORM radiation. Given the thousands of deaths caused every year by background radiation this makes very little logical sense. In NFLA's view the UK should stick to the same dose criterion used for regulating anthropogenic practices.

NFLA Steering Committee Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"NFLA is concerned with the proposed strategy of the UK and Devolved Governments to deal with naturally occurring radioactive materials. NFLA rejects the idea that NORM waste should be treated differently to radioactive waste created by the nuclear industry. The same environmental principles should be applied to the management of both. NFLA does not wish to see low level radioactive waste of any kind distributed around the country in landfill sites, and NFLA are disturbed by the blurring of the distinction between 'Low Level Waste' and 'Very Low Level Waste'.

Most importantly, NFLA rejects the idea that new disposal facilities should be provided to order so as to allow the expansion of industries which produce NORM waste, such as those wishing to create unconventional oil and gas drilling extraction. NFLA believe instead that, where there are alternative ways to carry out the task without producing NORM, that alternative should be implemented."

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or Pete Roche, the NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor on 0131 444 1445.

Notes for editors:

- (1) The NFLA Radioactive Waste Policy Briefing 49, providing a model response to the Governments' draft strategy for the management of naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM) waste in the UK, is attached and will go on the NFLA website.
- (2) UK and Devolved Governments, Strategy for the management of naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM) waste in the UK, March 2014  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/02/8435>
- (3) Rob Edwards, Natural Radiation May Kill Thousands. New Scientist, May 4 1996, p4.  
<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg15020280.300-natural-radiation-may-kill-thousands.html>
- (4) Robb JD (1994) Estimates of Radiation Detriment in a UK Population. NRPB Report R-260. National Radiological Protection Board. Chilton, Oxfordshire.

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