



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 16th March 2011

Japanese nuclear incident – why is the UK Government not temporarily closing down its oldest reactors for full safety checks like Germany?

With the continuing problems at the Level 6 nuclear accident at Fukushima in Japan (just one level less now than the Chernobyl disaster), the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) are asking why the UK Government has not followed the actions of the German Government to temporarily close nuclear reactors built before 1980 for full safety checks.

The German Energy Minister announced on March 15th that 7 of Germany's 17 existing nuclear reactors were to be temporarily closed for at least 3 months whilst exhaustive safety checks were conducted on them. Across Europe it was agreed that 'stress tests' be undertaken on all EU nuclear reactors, but the German action goes a step further (1).

In the UK there are four nuclear reactors built prior to 1980 that are still in operation –

- Oldbury in Gloucestershire, England, opened in 1968, which is due to be decommissioned in June 2011, but an application is pending to extend its life another year;
- Wylfa in Anglesey, Wales, opened in 1972, which has recently been given a life extension up to 2012;
- Hinkley Point B in Somerset, England, which is due for decommissioning in 2016;
- Hunterston B in North Ayrshire, Scotland, opened in 1976, which is due for decommissioning in 2016. (2)

The Fukushima reactor was built in 1972 and was due for decommissioning shortly. The decision to inject seawater in to the stricken reactors has meant that its decommissioning has effectively been brought forward to now. Concerns have been raised about whether, given its age, it should have still been in active operation up to the recent tragic events of last Friday.

The NFLA agree very much with the comments of the independent nuclear consultant Shaun Burnie, made last night on Newsnight Scotland (3); that extending the life of these oldest reactors makes no practical safety sense. The NFLA also believes that the UK Government, in co-operation with the Scottish and Welsh Governments, should follow the German example and temporarily suspend operations at these four reactors. In addition, it should also undertake seriously the 'stress tests' of those reactors built in the 1980s that were agreed at the EU yesterday, and consider how all UK reactors could respond to extreme coastal flooding events, sea-level rise, tidal surges and terrorist attack.

In reference to the proposed list of new UK nuclear power stations, the NFLA believe there are some fundamental issues that now need to be reconsidered in the light of the Japanese incident. For example:

- The NFLA has argued in its response to the UK Government's National Policy Statement that there are major concerns with evacuating people in the event of an incident at the Bradwell site in Essex, where residents on the nearby Mersea Island have only one major access point if emergency evacuation is required (4).
- Developing a new reactor at Oldbury remains a concern given its close proximity and the problems of evacuating the large population centre of nearby Bristol.
- In a similar manner, the proposed new reactors for Hartlepool and Heysham are near to very large population centres.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Chair Bailie George Regan comments:

“The terrible events in Fukushima are a warning to us all that high risk can never be written out of the equation with nuclear power. I believe the age of the Fukushima reactor could be a factor in how it has so catastrophically failed compared to other Japanese reactors. Using the precautionary principle I urge the UK Government to follow what seems to me the sensible policy of the German Government to temporarily close the oldest reactors at Wylfa, Hunterston, Hinkley Point and Oldbury and undertake exhaustive safety checks of them. I also think emergency planning and evacuation concerns at a number of proposed new build sites should also be urgently reconsidered before any further work is undertaken on developing them.”

Bailie Regan adds:

“Of course, the most sensible and enlightened energy policy that we should pursue in the coming decade is a rapid development of safe combinations of renewable energy, coupled with Council-supported energy efficiency programmes and a more decentralised energy market promoting imaginative and innovative microgeneration projects. Job hungry, clean, green, climate friendly and they will be built in a much quicker time than any new nuclear power station. If anything positive can come out of this terrible incident, it is a move to this type of energy policy, as many of our European partners have already done.” (5)

Ends.

Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930186.

Notes to editors:

- (1) The Local.de, 15th March 2011, <http://www.thelocal.de/national/20110315-33727.html>
- (2) World Nuclear Association – Nuclear power in the United Kingdom, <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf84.html>
- (3) BBC Newsnight Scotland, 15th March 2011, debate on nuclear power in Scotland, http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00zp6ml/Newsnight_Scotland_15_03_2011/
- (4) NFLA submission to the UK Government’s updated National Policy Statement on Nuclear Power Generation, 21st January 2011, http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/consultations/NFLA_NPS_Response_2011.pdf
- (5) Zero Carbon Britain 2030 shows how the UK and Ireland could achieve a fossil-fuel free energy mix by 2030 with no new nuclear capacity, <http://www.zerocarbonbritain.com/index.php/zcbreportmenu/category/1?download=1%3A2030>

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES