



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 12th April 2011

Fukushima now Level 7 nuclear incident – NFLA believes Weightman review must be widened in scope

The Japanese Nuclear Safety Commission has today raised the severity level of the ongoing Fukushima incident to 'Level 7' – the same as the Chernobyl disaster, only the second time this has occurred in the history of nuclear power production. The Commission raised the level after a reconsideration of all the radiation released since the reactor damage on March 11th. Radiation at a total of 630,000 terrabequerels had been estimated to have been released from the plant – 10% that of the Chernobyl disaster but still a significant release nonetheless. (1)

In addition, the Japanese Government has increased the evacuation zone beyond the 20km area to encompass five communities where radiation levels had exceeded the yearly limit of 1 millisievert. Japan's Nuclear Safety Commission said that according to preliminary results, the cumulative level of external radiation exceeded this in areas extending more than 60km (36 miles) to the north-west of the plant and about 40km to the south-southwest. (2)

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) remains highly concerned about the ongoing incident at Fukushima, which it believes will take many months to be fully placed under control. Given this, the NFLA will be submitting shortly its initial submission of the technical issues to the UK safety review being undertaken by HM Chief Nuclear Inspector, Mike Weightman, by noting that trying to take a considered view of this incident and report back to Government with conclusions by September remains an overly hasty timetable.

The NFLA will also submit that the Weightman review should be widened out to consider not just the specific technical issues around Fukushima but policy considerations around engineering, marine pollution, emergency planning and developing a more open and transparent nuclear safety culture (3). The NFLA are seeking to particularly consider the marine pollution issues that the Fukushima incident has raised, given that 11,500 tonnes of contaminated water were dumped into the Pacific Ocean and radiation levels at sea have been recorded at 4,000 times higher than normal safety limits.

Emergency planning concerns will be raised around the extent of the evacuation zone and whether the current UK legislation around this – the Radiation Emergency Planning and Public Information Regulations – is fit for purpose for a nuclear incident of the magnitude of Fukushima. Evacuation routes also remain a concern to the NFLA given, for example the lack of evacuation routes for 5000 people living on Mersea Island near Bradwell in Essex or the evacuation of Anglesey in the event of an incident at Wylfa. Finally, the extent of likely staffing cuts across the emergency services and local authorities due to public spending cuts over the next 3 years requires a complete review of nuclear emergency preparedness across the UK.

NFLA Chair Bailie George Regan comments:

"The increasing of the safely critical level of the Fukushima plant to the same point as Chernobyl is a clear indication of the devastating nature of this incident. Radiation levels may be lower, but this incident shows more than ever the continuing risk of nuclear accidents to the local population. I firmly believe the UK should be taking a sensible, considered approach to this incident and its implications on existing and proposed new reactors, not developing a narrow report that allows new nuclear build to speed ahead later in the year. Fukushima is a huge warning to us all, and we need to know all about what has happened and what may still happen before running headlong into an unnecessary new nuclear build programme." **Ends.**

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Notes for editors:

(1) and (2) – BBC News Online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13045341>

(3) The NFLA submission of issues it believes need to be considered in the Weightman review will be published on Thursday 14th April.

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