



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 8th January 2013

New Sizewell nuclear emergency plan – how is a 2.3 mile evacuation zone an improvement on a 1.5 mile zone?

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) welcomes the development of an expanded post Fukushima nuclear emergency plan for the Sizewell nuclear site by the Suffolk Resilience Forum, but believes it does not go far enough and could be a missed opportunity for improving public safety (1).

In the draft proposals put forward by the Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF), it has been recommended that the inner evacuation zone be extended from 1.5 miles (2.4kms) to 2.3 miles (4 kms) with an outer precautionary area of 9 miles (15 kms). The increase in the size of zones will cover a wider urban area containing an additional 6,500 people. The changes partially arise as a result of learning points from the Fukushima disaster of March 2011.

The NFLA welcomes the acknowledgement from the SRF that there is a low awareness of the potential dangers of a nuclear emergency in the local community and that the updated plans should offer shelter, evacuation and potassium iodide to people within the 9 mile zone. It also welcomes the acknowledgement from the SRF that it needs to know much more information about how many people are living within a wider 18 mile (30km) radius of Sizewell B so they can be provided with support in the event of an emergency. The NFLA asks the obvious question of why such information has never been attained in the decades of existence of the Sizewell nuclear reactors, which clearly would be beneficial in effectively responding to a nuclear emergency.

The NFLA has developed its own detailed policy report of nuclear emergency planning and changes that should be considered for civil and defence nuclear sites (2) following the Fukushima disaster. It advocates a much more comprehensive planning regime and larger, more flexible evacuation zones than the current plan or this proposed updated plan suggests. Though Sizewell and other UK nuclear sites may be low risks for the likes of tsunamis and earthquakes, there are many other scenarios which could necessitate a large-scale evacuation of the site, as future flooding and climate change models have suggested for example. The official Japanese Government report on the Fukushima disaster has pinpointed the considerable amount of man-made failings within this incident and serious failings in post disaster emergency planning and recovery planning. These should be directly extrapolated for Sizewell and other nuclear sites across the UK.

As an example of the problems of recovery planning, a recent article in the New York Times notes that independent experts believe the clean-up and decontamination of the Fukushima area remains 'primitive, slapdash and bereft of the clean-up methods lauded by Japanese Government scientists as effective in removing harmful radioactive caesium from the environment'. (3)

The NFLA will submit its report to the SRF for consideration in the public consultation for the proposed updated plan. The NFLA is also working with other independent groups who are seeking to put forward sensible, well grounded and well researched points to improve the UK nuclear emergency planning regime. It is encountering significant resistance from public agencies to have a reasoned discussion on such matters and calls on DECC, the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and County Resilience Forums to more actively engage with concerned local community groups, independent experts and national organisations like the NFLA to improve community resilience in the event of such serious incidents affecting a UK nuclear site.

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As part of its own process of understanding what actually happened at Fukushima and the emergency and post emergency response, the NFLA has invited two eyewitnesses to the incident to speak of their personal experience and their views on improvements to UK nuclear safety at a special NFLA seminar in Manchester on the 25th January (4). The eyewitnesses Mitsuko Sonoda and her English partner Geoff Read have many important points to make about improving emergency response after a nuclear incident, and these will be fed to public agencies following the seminar.

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“Though a limited increase of the evacuation zones and other enhancements to the Sizewell emergency plan is welcome, I would like to see a much more comprehensive level of public engagement from County Resilience Forums, the Office for Nuclear Regulation and DECC to the concerns of groups like the NFLA. The Fukushima disaster showed the huge problems in evacuating large numbers of people and that evacuation is more than likely to take place over a much larger area than the Sizewell plan suggests. The NFLA will actively input its comments to the public review of this plan and the wider UK nuclear emergency planning review. I encourage public agencies to respond to them as we all want to see public protection improve following the devastation affecting Fukushima.”

Ends

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

Notes to editors:

- (1) BBC, 'Sizewell nuclear incident plan post Fukushima inadequate', 7th January 2013.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-20937668>
Bury Mercury, 'Suffolk: Whole town to get anti-radiation pills as part of N-plant safety plan', 7th January 2013.
http://www.burymercury.co.uk/news/suffolk_whole_town_to_get_anti_radiation_pills_as_part_of_n_plant_safety_plan_1_1783878
- (2) NFLA Policy Briefing 100, 'The Fukushima disaster and UK nuclear emergency planning – the need for a fundamental change?' 14th September 2012.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/NFLA_NB_100_Nuclear_emergency_planning.pdf
- (3) New York Times, 'In Japan, a painfully slow sweep of the Fukushima area', 7th January 2013
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/08/business/japans-cleanup-after-a-nuclear-accident-is-denounced.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all&
- (4) NFLA SC Seminar, 'Fukushima: Two Years On – reflections from eyewitnesses on the disaster, post disaster and lessons for the UK', Manchester Town Hall, 25th January 2013.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/events/NFLA_SC_Fukushima_Flyer_250113.pdf

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