



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

## **NFLA calls on Public Health England and the Environment Agency to fully investigate new radioactive particles found on beaches close to Sellafield**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) calls today on public health bodies to investigate and analyse further recent deposits of radioactive particles found on beaches close to Sellafield. It also calls on the same agencies to urgently consider asking the local Council to put warning signs on Seascale beach as an interim contingency public safety measure.

NFLA welcomes the media release from CORE Cumbria, which notes a Sellafield Ltd announcement of 'two unusual finds' on West Cumbrian beaches in May and June 2014. NFLA echoes CORE's call for Public Health England to not just fully analyse them, but consider interim precautionary measures for local communities using the beaches. NFLA also plans to discuss this matter with the marine pollution group KIMO International, in order to raise these issues at the Inter-governmental OSPAR Radiation Substances Committee, which meets in the new year. (1)

As CORE note, a radioactively contaminated stone found in May 2014 tested with the highest level of Caesium 137 ever discovered since the current Sellafield monitoring programme began. This was followed in June 2014 by the discovery of a radioactive particle on the publicly accessible beach at Seascale with a radioactive contact dose rate of 2.8 milliSieverts per hour (mSv/hr). This is almost three times higher than the statutory public dose limit for a whole year (1 milliSievert per year).

As CORE note:

"Comprised of Caesium-137, Americium-241, Europium-154 & 155 and probably Strontium-90, the particle has been described by the Environment Agency (EA) as 'being unusual as it was emitting mainly beta rather than gamma radiation'."

NFLA is surprised, to say the least, that – despite taking advice from the Environment Agency – Public Health England (PHE) has responded that, whilst the radioactive particle did not pose a greater risk from ingestion than those found to date, 'the skin dose rate is at or around the value at which their risk assessment should be reviewed'. Yet, after further analysis of the particle, PHE has advised the Environment Agency that the finding of the Seascale particle cannot in itself represent a substantial public health risk. It calls instead for a reassessment of monitoring capabilities for particles of this type and a review of alternative monitoring techniques. (2)

NFLA believe that the health and environment agencies should be asking the local Council to put warning signs out now on the Seascale beach as an interim contingency measure, rather than simply taking additional time for further assessments and research. If such radioactive particles are being found on the beach that are above public safe dose levels, surely warning signs have to be the priority in the short-term, whilst more detailed research can be undertaken for a later date?

The first priority has to be the protection of the public from harm, and these recent radiation levels suggest the beaches around Sellafield could pose a public health risk. How many other particles with such levels of dangerous radioactivity exist in the area, and are they travelling even greater distances? Where do they derive from? Such data is critically needed. NFLA also calls on the Department of Health's independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) to prioritise urgent and comprehensive health research for areas around the likes of Sellafield in Cumbria and Dounreay in Caithness, in which the greatest concern remains. (3)

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NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“I am concerned that a radioactive particle almost three times the safe annual public dose is being found on a public beach close to the Sellafield site. Are these one off events, or as with Dalgety Bay and Dounreay, are many more particles going to be found shortly? Surely warning signs need to be set up on Seascale beach to inform the public of the potential dangers of such radioactive particles as an interim contingency measure until research is fully completed as to the potential health effects of such particles. It is fine to do more research, but it should not mean that we wait around for its findings before taking sensible, precautionary measures now.”

NFLA All Ireland Forum Chair Councillor Mark Dearey added:

“Many Irish coastal communities have been worried for decades over the health impacts of radioactive discharges derived from sites like Sellafield. To hear that radioactive particles are being found on Cumbrian beaches at such high dose levels is alarming to me. Are such particles reaching Irish shores? I call on public health bodies and the Radiological Institute of Ireland to urgently analyse the Irish coastline to investigate whether such particles are ending up near our seaside towns and cities.”

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

- (1) OSPAR Commission, <http://www.ospar.org>
- (2) CORE Cumbria, Media Release, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014.  
<http://www.corecumbria.co.uk/newsapp/pressreleases/pressmain.asp?StrNewsID=349>
- (3) COMARE reports are accessible through: <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/comare-reports>.

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