



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 15th October 2013

Following the discovery of major radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay, are some Welsh ex WW2 bases similarly contaminated?

On behalf of the UK Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA), Pembrokeshire based independent Radiation Policy Advisor Tim Deere-Jones, warns Welsh local authorities that an unknown number of Welsh ex Second World War military bases may pose radiation threats to members of the public and the Welsh environment.

At Dalgety Bay in Fife, large radioactive particles have been found on the beach and around the Dalgety Bay shoreline. Their origin is likely to have come from radium tipped dials from dismantled Second World War (WW2) fighter planes, which were disposed of after the former airfield was decommissioned.

A major NFLA report (1) published yesterday notes that the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) have determined that the MOD should be responsible for the clean-up of the site, but the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is disputing these findings. It is possible that the area could also be formally designated as 'radioactive contaminated land'.

As the report also noted, more recently 26 other ex Second World War sites, across the UK, have also been shown to be similarly contaminated, and it appears to be the case that the cause of the contamination there is also the decommissioning of WW2 equipment. These sites include the old SAS HQ at Hereford and the old Red Arrows Air Base in Gloucestershire

However, the MOD and the Environment Agency have been unable to confirm whether or not any airfields or other sites in Wales are likely to have experienced similar disposal of WW2 equipment. The MOD has postulated that its "best guess" is that between 150 and 250 WW2 sites across England and Wales may have been thus contaminated, but it has also admitted that there may be as many as 1,000 contaminated sites. It seems highly likely that a number of these sites will be situated in Wales.

On behalf of the NFLA Tim Deere-Jones (2) has researched the available data for his home county of Pembrokeshire and identified at least 14 ex WW2 RAF sites, some of which were flying bases, others radar and anti aircraft. All would have held stocks of radium contaminated material. To date it has not been possible to find ANY data on the fate/disposal of the equipment held at any of these airfields.

It is anticipated that there will be many more such sites across Wales, particularly in the southern counties, which would have assisted the guarding of WW2 Convoys using the Bristol Channel ports, and in the northern counties, which would have assisted the guarding of WW2 convoys using the Liverpool Bay ports. It should also be noted that army and naval bases may also be similarly contaminated. As of yet, a fully comprehensive list of former Second World War Welsh sites has not yet been identified.

Tim Deere-Jones says: "Plainly this has the potential to be an issue of relevance to Wales and the Welsh public, especially in the context that a number of these sites will be open to the public, while others may already have been the subject of industrial or housing development, closely adjacent to housing and industrial sites or integrated into farmland. Evidently, in the event of radium contamination of such sites, there will be a variety of pathways by which human and wildlife populations could be exposed to radioactive contamination."

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

The NFLA are contacting the Welsh Government and the Welsh Assembly to initiate a response by the relevant authorities (MOD and Environment Agency) which would clarify the situation. It will also urge such authorities to conduct appropriate radiological surveys of potential risk sites, and then to take, or initiate, appropriate follow up decontamination action if such contamination was found. This would ensure that there are no ongoing issues of public safety in Wales, such as have now surfaced in Scotland, and for which a major environmental safety risks is evident at a number of sites.

NFLA Welsh Forum Co Chair, Councillor Ed Bridges said:

“The NFLA’s report on Dalgety Bay and the identification of a large number of other bases which could have radium contamination is highly alarming. The early research by Tim Deere-Jones suggests this could also be very much a Welsh issue of concern as well. I am keen that we get greater clarity on this from the Welsh Government and the MOD. Who knows if Welsh Councils are sitting on similar issues that are facing Fife Council at Dalgety Bay?”

Ends

Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary - 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196.

Tim Deere-Jones, Environmental Radioactivity Consultant - 01834 871011 or timdj@talktalk.net

Notes to Editors

- (1) Nuclear Free Local Authorities Radioactive Waste Briefing No 42 – Dalgety Bay and other contaminated sites concerns, October 2013.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/Rad_Waste_Brfg_42_Dalgety_Bay_%26_the_wider_radium_legacy.pdf
- (2) SUMMARY BRIEFING - Radium **Contamination of WW2 Airfields and military bases in Wales, prepared for the NFLA by Tim Deere-Jones**

The problem:

Radioactive contamination from decommissioned WW2 military equipment has been discovered at a number of UK ex-military bases, at sufficient levels to pose a potential health risk to members of the public and/or those working in proximity. Although a few sites have been positively identified as contaminated, it is thought that there are many other (as yet unidentified) spread across the UK countryside. There are good grounds to suspect that there are a number of such sites in Wales.

More detail of the Identified Problem in Scotland:

A review of the unfolding environmental issue at Dalgety Bay on the Fife coast of Scotland, where extensive, man made, WW2 radioactivity has been discovered on the local beach and foreshore and an area inland of the beach, reveals that the extent of this radioactivity has now been shown to be greater than was previously thought and is shown to have spread into the inter- tidal zone of the Dalgety environment, where it has contaminated wildlife and the marine ecology.

It's consensually agreed that the radioactive contamination has arisen as a result of the destruction (by scrapping, fire and burial) of aircraft equipment such as luminous dials etc (contaminated with radium) at the end of the WW2, when the airfield at Dalgety, and the aircraft and equipment based on it, were decommissioned. The Ministry of Defence has admitted responsibility for the Dalgety pollution and a number of attempts have been made to clear and decontaminate the area. However, to date

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

these efforts have not been successful, largely because the efforts have been half hearted and based on an incomplete understanding of the behaviour of such contamination in the coastal environment.

The radioactivity consists of both radioactive small and larger particles and it is considered that there may be some health risk to those who are regular "users" of the beach and foreshore (via pathways of skin contact and possibly inhalation, ingestion/consumption of local seafood). Warnings are posted at relevant sections of the coast, and the authorities have warned that the area may have to be declared "contaminated land" and exclusion zones may have to be set up unless decontamination can be fully completed.

Identified sites outside Scotland

More recently, 15 other sites across the UK have also been identified as similarly contaminated and it appears to be the case that the cause of the contamination there is also the decommissioning of WW2 equipment. These sites include the old SAS HQ at Hereford and the old Red Arrows Air Base in Gloucestershire

Lack of information for Wales

However, the MOD and the Environment Agency have been unable to confirm whether or not any airfields or other sites in Wales are likely to have experienced similar disposal of WW2 equipment. It has been postulated that the "best guess" is that between 150 and 250 WW2 sites across England and Wales may have been thus contaminated, but it's also admitted that there may be as many as 1,000 contaminated sites. It seems highly likely that some of these sites will be situated in Wales.

Some available data for South West Wales

A preliminary review of the available data for the county of Pembrokeshire has identified the following 14 WW2 sites: Dale, Angle, Carew, Templeton, Withybush, Manorbier, Pembroke Dock, St Davids, Talbenny, Hayscastle Cross, St Bees Head, St Twynells, Strumble Head, Warren (though there may be others).

Some of these were flying bases, others radar and anti aircraft. All would have held stocks of radium contaminated material. No readily available data on the fate/disposal of the equipment held at any of these airfields has been identified to date.

It is to be anticipated that there will be many more such sites across Wales, particularly in the southern counties, which would have assisted the guarding of WW2 Convoys using the Bristol Channel ports, and in the northern counties, which would have assisted the guarding of WW2 convoys using the Liverpool Bay ports. Naval and army bases may also be implicated. As of yet, it has not been possible to find a fully comprehensive list of either ALL of the Welsh WW2 sites or those welsh sites where radium contamination might be present.

It is evident that this is an issue of some relevance to Wales and the Welsh public, especially in the context that a number of such potential sites in Wales are open to the public, closely adjacent to housing and industrial sites or integrated into farmland. Evidently, in the event of radium contamination of such sites, there a variety of pathways by which human and wildlife populations could be exposed to anthropogenic radioactivity.

A recent (April 2012) report by the DECC, offers Statutory Guidance to local authorities on the identification and inspection of WW2 military sites (and factories and storage sites too) in order to

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

search for any such radioactive contamination. This report might well assist the WAG and Welsh Councils to take such action.

In the context of the Dalgety Bay events it is imperative that, in Wales, investigative action should be taken to initiate a response by the relevant authorities (MOD and Envoy Agency) which would clarify the situation, conduct appropriate radiological surveys of potential risk sites, and then to take, or initiate, appropriate follow up decontamination action if such contamination was found. This would ensure that there are no ongoing issues of public safety in Wales, such as have now surfaced in Scotland where people have been using contaminated beaches since the end of WW2.

It is proposed that this issue should be taken forward by:

- compiling a complete list of WW2 military bases in Wales,
- submitting appropriate Freedom of Information data requests to the MOD in order to attempt identification of both airfields (and other sites)
- submitting Freedom of Information data requests to the MOD in order to attempt identification of sites where WW2 decommissioning activity of radioactive material occurred
- summarising the available information on the sources of WW2 radium and the evidence for its long term fate and behaviour in the environment
- summarising the available data on the environmental, ecological and public health impacts of long term exposure to WW2 radium contaminated materials
- summarising the April 2012 DECC report (RCL Statutory Guidance) in order to provide outline information on potential "best practice" action

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES