



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 9th December 2014

NFLA report outlines unreliability of aging nuclear reactors and calls for radical alternative energy policy to be prioritised by Government

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publishes today a report which provides a cogent analysis on the extent of the unreliability of the UK's aging nuclear power stations.

The report was commissioned by the NFLA to understand the extent of unplanned shutdowns in the period 2012 – 2014, and whether the optimistic claims that the nuclear industry can plug generating gaps in other sectors of the electricity sector is realisable. (1)

The report finds that:

- In the three years 2012 - 2014, at least 62 unplanned shutdowns have occurred.
- Poor performances are not evenly spread: the worst performers were Dungeness 'A' & 'B', Heysham 1 & 2, Torness 1 & 2, and Sizewell. Some reactors had no reported unplanned outages – Heysham B2 and Hunterston B1.
- At its lowest point, towards the end of November 2014, less than half (43%) of UK nuclear electricity capacity was available due to shutdowns.
- UK nuclear reactors have such poor operating records that EDF declines to report their performances to nuclear industry publications, unlike most other reactors world-wide.
- Unplanned shutdowns cause serious problems for electricity supply regulation and planning.
- A major likely reason for poor performance is that most reactors are over 30 years old and past their sell-by dates, some by considerable margins.

The NFLA report concludes that the National Grid is being overly optimistic in its assessment that nuclear power will provide the reliability over the winter period to cover the UK's electricity needs.

The impressive record of wind energy in the past few months reiterates the growing importance of renewable energy in the UK's electricity generation. Wind power generation is now an essential part of the UK's energy mix. This autumn it has even exceeded the share of nuclear power generation in the UK's energy mix on a number of occasions. Its generating capacity in Scotland is particularly impressive, where it provided 107% of Scottish household electricity demand throughout November 2014 – or 813 GWh to the National Grid. Indeed on one particularly windy day, November 11th 2014, wind turbines produced the equivalent of 221% of domestic Scottish demand. (2)

With purported new nuclear reactors still many years away from ever being built, NFLA calls on the UK Government to prioritise a greater level of generation from wind, and other forms of renewable energy, to compensate for likely unplanned outages with more unreliable and old nuclear power stations. Enhanced Local Authority-led energy efficiency programmes and community microgeneration schemes should also be further encouraged as essential short-term stop-gap measures.

The increasingly decrepit state of UK nuclear power stations also presents a serious safety issue. UK nuclear regulatory agencies are very much aware of the continual reduction in safety margins resulting from graphite loss and crumbling in the moderators of AGR reactors. As recent events at the Heysham and Hartlepool reactors emphasise, the policy of allowing significant lifetime extensions to our aging civil nuclear reactors needs to be reviewed. (3) The NFLA report shows that on average there have been over 20 unplanned outages a year at UK nuclear reactors. Their unreliability is a matter of major concern as regards to the UK's overall energy security.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“This report outlines in some detail the unreliability of UK nuclear reactors in the past three years, with an average of 20 unplanned shutdowns in each year. This has to be of great concern to the public for our energy security over this winter and onwards. I call upon the UK Government, the National Grid and the nuclear regulators to urgently review the safety issues around such a large number of unplanned shutdowns. The Government also has to prioritise alternatives to nuclear power generation over the next 12 months to ensure the unreliability of nuclear power does not lead to the ‘lights going off’ around the country. This has to be dealt with as a matter of some urgency.”

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or Pete Roche, NFLA Policy Advisor on 0131 444 1445.

Notes for editors:

- (1) NFLA Policy Briefing 127, ‘NFLA concerns over aging nuclear reactors in the UK’, is attached with this media release, and will be placed on the NFLA website.
- (2) Business Green, ‘Wind farms powered 107% of Scottish homes in November’, 8th December <http://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/2385476/wind-farms-powered-107-per-cent-of-scottish-homes-in-november>
- (3) NFLA Media Release, 4th September 2014 http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_nuclear_reactor_closures_&_energy_needs.pdf

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