



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 5th July 2012

NFLA alarmed to hear of 263 fire incidents on UK nuclear submarines since 1987

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) today publicises an alarming Parliamentary answer that notes 263 significant fire incidents have taken place on UK nuclear powered and nuclear armed submarines since 1987 (1).

In his answer to a question from Angus Robertson MP, the Defence Minister Peter Luff confirms that since 1st January 1987 there have been:

- 243 small scale fires that were categorised as a localised fire, such as a minor electrical fault creating smoke, dealt with quickly and effectively using minimal onboard resources. 67 of these were on ballistic missile submarines.
- 20 medium scale fires that were generally categorised as a localised fire, such as a failure of mechanical equipment creating smoke and flame, requiring use of significant onboard resources. Six of these were on ballistic missile submarines.
- In addition, three fires occurred while the submarines involved were in naval bases, requiring both ship and external resources. One of these was on a ballistic missile submarine.
- Information on whether ballistic missile submarines were armed with nuclear weapons when the fires occurred is not held in the format requested by the question.

The NFLA is alarmed at the amount of fire incidents taking place on board UK nuclear submarines and the possibility that some of these incidents may have taken place on submarines containing Trident nuclear submarines. It advocates the continued need to improve defence nuclear safety. This comes at a time when the Aldermaston nuclear weapons facility is about to be prosecuted by the Office of Nuclear Regulation following a serious fire incident in 2010 (2).

Furthermore, the Parliamentary answer also tallies with NFLA concerns around the general safety of UK nuclear defence facilities, given 33 significant issues outlined by the Office of Nuclear Regulation in its post-Fukushima 'stress test' reports on key defence nuclear facilities (3).

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said:

"To find out that there have been 263 minor and medium scale fires on UK nuclear powered and potentially nuclear armed submarines over the past 25 years should be a matter of real concern to the Ministry of Defence and the wider public. It is equivalent to over 10 incidents a year. I am only relieved that the medium-scale incidents did not get out of hand. Taken as a whole and in conjunction with other incidents across the defence nuclear sector I am worried its health and safety culture may be falling behind the civil nuclear sector, particularly at a time of deep defence cuts. I urge the MoD to reduce these incidents as a matter of urgency and conduct a full review of its health, safety and nuclear emergency planning strategy."

Ends

Further information –

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THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Notes to editors:

- (1) Parliamentary answer from Defence Minister Peter Luff MP to Angus Robertson MP, Hansard, 3rd July 2012 (Reference 113754).
- (2) Nuclear Information Service, 'Health and Safety Executive to prosecute Atomic Weapons Establishment over fire', 16th June 2012.
http://nuclearinfo.org/view/nuclear_sites/accidents/a2183
- (3) See NFLA Media Release, 17th May 2012.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Sellafield_stress_tests.pdf

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