



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

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The NFLA shares concerns with Norway over a critical accident at Sellafield

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities call for a Government and nuclear industry response to an important piece of research undertaken by the Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority (NRPA) considering the effects of a hypothetical critical accident at the Sellafield High Active Liquors (HAL) facility. The research identified that, if prevailing northeasterly winds occurred, Norway could have radioactive materials hitting its coastline just 9 hours after an accident (1).

The NRPA were asked by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment to perform an impact assessment of a hypothetical accident at Sellafield. As recently as January 2009, the Norwegian Minister of the Environment has called for the closure of the Sellafield site after it emerged that it had taken five days to be notified of a radioactive leak from a ventilation pipe in the old Magnox part of the facility.

The NRPA study considered a 'worst case scenario' of an accident involving the B215 facility at Sellafield, which contains about 1000m³ HAL divided between 21 specially designed Highly Active Storage Tanks (HASTs). The HAL is a product of reprocessing from the Magnox and Thorp plants which require continual cooling and active management.

The study used the example of a real accident of a similar facility in Russia in 1957 and calculated the effects of a leak from the Sellafield HAL facility. Using such data, the NRPA calculate that a radioactive plume will hit the Norwegian coast around 9 hours after an accident. It calculates a 1% release of the assumed total inventory in the HASTs will receive a radioactive fall-out of over 100 kilo-becquerels on its west coast, and over 10 kilo-becquerels in mid and south Norway – far in excess of 'safe' levels of exposure. This is considerably higher than the radioactive fall-out that Norway suffered from the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

Despite uncertainties over the likelihood and transport of an accidental release at Sellafield, the report does conclude that its emergency preparedness procedures need to be reviewed and seeks to develop bilateral co-operation with UK authorities to reduce the risks still further.

As the NRPA concludes, "This project has highlighted the importance of continuing to reduce the risks of storage of HAL at Sellafield. British authorities have indicated they regard this type of incident as potentially serious and that the situation is under continuous evaluation for further reduction of the risks of accidents at Sellafield".

NFLA Ireland Chair, Councillor Mark Dearey said:

"This informative and useful study again reiterates arguments made by the NFLA for many years over its deep concern of an accident involving the Sellafield Highly Active Liquors facility. We urge greater co-operation between the UK and Norwegian authorities on this matter, as is beginning to happen with Irish authorities. The study also confirms our view that any nuclear new build at the Sellafield site, which is being actively proposed, would be folly and clearly increase the potential risks of such an accident".

NFLA Scotland Convenor, Councillor Euan McLeod, added:

"This study from Norway is very timely. Coastal countries around the North Atlantic have been campaigning for years for the closure of Sellafield due to its highly radioactive storage tanks. The NFLA agrees with their concerns and will work with them in eventually achieving it."

ENDS

(1) The study can be found at: http://www.nrpa.no/internett_eng/index.asp?LanguageCode=9

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES