



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 14th May 2014

NFLA welcome publication of COMARE report on Dalgety Bay and other MOD owned sites and wonder why MOD has suppressed it for so long

NFLA welcomes the decision of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to belatedly publish a report by the independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). This report analysed the potential health effects of radium contamination on the Dalgety Bay site in Fife, and comments on other MOD owned or formerly owned sites. (1)

That the MOD is only publishing this report following its leaking to *'The Guardian'* newspaper (2) is symptomatic of the MOD's disregard for openness and transparency with reference to its nuclear legacy. The local population around Dalgety Bay, and other similar MOD-owned or previously owned sites, should be rightly angry at the six month suppression in publishing this report. Environment journalist Rob Edwards and *'The Guardian'* should be congratulated for bringing this to the public's attention, as should the 'whistle-blower' who leaked it to them.

NFLA has been working closely with its member authority Fife Council to monitor and resolve the radioactive contamination around the Dalgety Bay beach. (3) The contamination derives from radium tipped dials in former Second World War fighters that were buried near the beach.

The COMARE report notes that the radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay poses "a potential risk to public health", and it is sharply critical of the MOD's failure to provide a comprehensive list of other potentially contaminated sites, calling this "unacceptable" as it "implies an unknown risk to the general population".

Other COMARE recommendations in the report include:

- The present monitoring and recovery programme should continue until a long-term decision on the remediation strategy for the site is fully agreed upon.
- It calls on the MOD with the Scottish Government to take steps to ensure the effective remediation of the site is undertaken as soon as possible.
- Ongoing local epidemiological study reviews should be undertaken over the next 5 – 10 years.
- COMARE will seek authority from the UK Government to create a UK-wide list of sites contaminated by radium in a similar manner to Dalgety Bay.
- An accredited UK-based measurement capability of higher activity sources should be established.
- Further experimental work on skin doses should be undertaken in the area, particularly in reference to young children.

NFLA supports these recommendations and calls on the MOD to work closely with the Scottish Government, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Fife Council and public health bodies to ensure they are fully implemented. The failure of the MOD to decontaminate the Dalgety Bay site sooner has been a woeful example of their environmental stewardship. NFLA now call on all agencies to work hard to remediate the site as soon as possible, with the MOD providing suitable resources to all agencies involved with it.

NFLA is also keen to see MOD put in place a full analysis and remediation plan of all other sites affected by radium and other radioactive contamination, particularly in the 25 sites noted in the COMARE report and in other sites as yet not fully considered. (4)

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Whilst NFLA is pleased that COMARE has objected in such strong terms to the MOD over the radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay beach, it remains concerned that COMARE still says so little in public over the more serious radioactive contamination at Sellafield beach in Cumbria.

By "more serious" NFLA means:

- more numerous radioactive particles per square metre,
- more dangerous radionuclides, e.g. plutonium isotopes, absent at Dalgety Bay,
- higher radioactivity levels per particle, and
- heavily frequented beaches, especially by children.

The main difference between the two beaches, of course, is that Dalgety Bay's contamination does not involve a civil nuclear power site, whereas Sellafield's contamination does. This unequal attention towards the two beaches raises a discrepancy that the NFLA remains concerned about. COMARE needs to show the same level of attention to Sellafield or it risks its neutrality being put into question over nuclear power.

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I am pleased that COMARE's report on the health risks of radium contamination at Dalgety Bay and 25 other sites has been finally made public. The MOD is seriously at fault in not resolving contamination at Dalgety Bay sooner, and I urge them to take on board these recommendations and work with SEPA, Scottish Government and Fife Council to remediate the site as soon as possible. Only then can local communities be fully reassured. NFLA is concerned that Dalgety Bay may just be the tip of the iceberg and that many other sites may be similarly contaminated, putting at risk the public health of other local communities. MOD must resolve these concerns urgently.

Whilst welcoming COMARE's work on this issue, I remain concerned that it has not undertaken the same level of analysis of other beaches affected by the civil nuclear power programme, particularly at Sellafield and Dounreay. I urge it to undertake further analysis and publish it as soon as possible. COMARE needs to verify in much greater detail if contamination around sites such as Sellafield and Dounreay are a significant public health risk, as many international studies have suggested for nuclear power plants elsewhere."

Ends

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

Notes for editors:

- (1) COMARE report on radiation contamination on military sites, as leaked to The Guardian, 14th May 2014
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/interactive/2014/may/mod-comare-report-radioactive-contamination-military-sites-uk>
- (2) The Guardian, 14th May 2014
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/may/14/mod-nuclear-waste-contamination-report-dalgety-bay>
- (3) NFLA Radioactive Waste Policy Briefing 42 – The Radium Legacy at Dalgety Bay and other sites, and other contamination problems, October 2013.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/Rad_Waste_Brfg_42_Dalgety_Bay_%26_the_wider_radium_legacy.pdf
- (4) NFLA Media Release on whether other MOD owned sites are similarly contaminated, 15th October 2013 http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Welsh_MOD_radium_sites.pdf

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