



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 14th October 2013

NFLA publishes report raising concerns over the radium legacy at Dalgety Bay; and asks how many more MOD sites could be affected?

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publishes today a new study considering the issues around radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay in Fife and highlights a large number of other existing and former Ministry of Defence sites which could contain similar levels of contamination. (1)

Over the past couple of years, the local Fife Council, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), the independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have been dealing with the complexities of radium contamination on the beach around Dalgety Bay in east 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 aeroplanes, which were disposed of after the former airfield was decommissioned. As the NFLA briefing notes, SEPA have determined that the MOD should be responsible for the clean-up of the site, but the MOD is disputing these findings. It is possible that the area could also be formally designated as 'radioactively contaminated land'. The COMARE group of health experts have also raised serious public health concerns with the radioactive contamination. The local MP, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, has been highly critical of the MOD's challenge to SEPA's findings and urged a swift clean-up of the area.

The NFLA report provides a full overview of this alarming matter, but it also further considers a long list of other existing or former MOD owned sites across Scotland, England and Wales which may also contain similar levels of radium contamination. Significant work for example is ongoing at RAF Kinloss to determine if this site is contaminated. At least 12 sites in Scotland and 14 sites in England have already been mentioned as being potentially contaminated (2), with a question mark over a number of sites in Wales (3).

In the NFLA's view, parts of the Dalgety Bay site do appear to meet the criteria for designation as 'Radioactive Contaminated Land'. Relying on public warning signs alone is not a long-term solution for the site. When the MOD finally publishes its clean-up plan, and if it still refuses to foot the clean-up bill, it is the NFLA's view that it may be necessary then to designate the area 'Radioactive Contaminated Land' and for SEPA to enforce that the MOD pay for clean-up of the site in full.

The NFLA also calls for the MOD to accept liability for its past actions at Dalgety Bay and other sites around the UK. Remediation work at Dalgety Bay is long overdue and an urgent programme of monitoring needs to be undertaken at all other potentially contaminated sites around the UK.

NFLA Scotland Convenor, Councillor Bill Butler said:

"The radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay is a clear example of how dangerous it is to leave low level radiation sources on former military sites. It is outrageous that the Ministry of Defence has not dealt with this incident many years ago, and that it is still continuing to challenge the expert findings of SEPA. This NFLA report shows though that Dalgety Bay could be the tip of the iceberg and many other communities may have to endure the problems that NFLA member Fife Council is currently having to deal with. We fully support the Council and SEPA in finding a long-term safe solution to this problem and call on the MOD to fully fund remediation efforts to improve the environment around Dalgety Bay and to undertake such work as a matter of urgency."

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Ends

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Notes to editors:

- (1) The NFLA Policy Briefing on Dalgety Bay and the wider radium legacy is attached with this briefing.
- (2) As noted in the briefing, the list of other MOD potential contaminated sites, as revealed to the Guardian and other media outlets include:
 - Ministry of Defence firing range, Dundrennan, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway
 - Former Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank, Perth and Kinross
 - Royal Artillery Range, RAF Benbecula, Western Isles
 - Former air base, RAF Edzell, Angus
 - Former air base, RAF Kinloss, Forres, Morayshire
 - Former air base, RAF Machrihanish, Mull of Kintyre
 - Royal Marines base, RM Condor, Arbroath, Angus
 - Former army luminising depot, Forthside, Stirling
 - Former radium plant, Gowkthrapple, Wishaw, North Lanarkshire
 - Boatyard on site of an old radium works, Balloch, Dunbartonshire
 - Former military aircraft base, Dalgety Bay, Fife
 - Beaches near the Dounreay nuclear complex, Caithness
 - RAF Pelham in Norfolk.
 - Chatham Dockyard, Kent.
 - Eskmeals, Cumbria – Depleted Uranium Weapons Firing Test Centre.
 - Hilsea, Portsmouth, Hampshire – disposal of radium residues.
 - Former SAS HQ at Stirling Lines, Hereford
 - MS Daedalus, near Portsmouth: former naval air base
 - Defence Aviation Repair Agency Gosport, Hampshire: former aircraft repair depot
 - RAF Henlow, Bedfordshire: air base
 - RAF Newton, Nottingham: former air base
 - RAF Little Rissington, Gloucestershire: air base and former home to Red Arrows
 - Stirling Lines, Hereford: former SAS headquarters
 - RAF Shawbury, Shrewsbury, Shropshire: air training centre
 - RNAS Anthon, Cumbria: former naval air base
 - RAF Carlisle, Cumbria: a former military equipment depot.
- (3) None of the MoD's 15 sites released to the Guardian were in Wales. However, given that DECC has estimated there could be anywhere between 150 and 1000 contaminated sites across England and Wales (not just MoD), the independent radiation policy consultant Tim Deere-Jones has speculated that some of the 14 former WW2 airfields in Pembrokeshire or the naval bases at Milford Haven Waterway could be contaminated. His presentation on this matter to the NFLA Welsh Forum is available from the NFLA Secretariat.

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