



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 21st November 2014

NFLA deeply concerned over “unauthorised” radioactive release at Dounreay and the "unacceptable behaviours and practices" by some of its staff.

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) is alarmed to hear the detail of a serious incident at the Dounreay facility in Caithness, which led to an “unauthorised” release of radioactivity on the site. (1)

According to a recently released report from Dounreay Site Restoration Limited (DSRL), the company responsible for decommissioning the site on the north coast of Scotland, the unauthorised release of radioactivity had arisen out of "unacceptable behaviours and practices" by staff. (2)

A fire broke out on October 7th 2014 in the prototype fast reactor sodium tank building, where sodium residues from the operation of the reactor are stored. The Dounreay on-site fire brigade extinguished the blaze and fortunately no one was hurt.

In DSRL's statement it notes: "The investigation thoroughly checked each aspect of the work and identified procedural non-compliances and behavioural practices that were factors in the incident, and fell short of the values and standards expected of our people. It also confirmed the release of radioactivity via an unauthorised route."

The radioactivity release was of tritium gas. As a result of the incident, the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) served DSRL with an improvement notice relating to the fire on November 11th.

DSRL's statement also noted: "Our investigation identified unacceptable behaviours and practices that fell well short of our values and standards. It is important to take the time to ensure as many lessons are learned from this incident as possible. We are determined to improve our behaviours and compliance to ensure that we always meet the high standards expected on a nuclear site."

For NFLA this is an alarming incident which needs much greater focus and publicising. It follows on from a long history of safety incidents at the site. The fact that staff appear not to be fully conversant with safety procedures for dealing with highly flammable radioactive waste materials is quite disgraceful. NFLA calls on the ONR, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and DSRL to provide more information on this serious safety lapse and it also calls on the Scottish Government to get involved in ensuring lessons are learned so it does not happen again.

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I am extremely concerned to hear about what appears a serious safety incident at the Dounreay site, which contains some of the most dangerous radioactive material in Scotland. To hear that critical staff were not fully conversant in fire safety procedures and that a release of tritium occurred; putting into danger staff and the wider public; is quite disgraceful at such a sensitive nuclear site like Dounreay. It raises greater alarm given the ongoing transport of highly radioactive material by rail, and shortly by sea, from Dounreay to Sellafield. The Dounreay site authorities, nuclear regulators, the NDA and the Scottish Government need to get to the bottom of why these safety failings took place. It appears more luck than judgement that people were not seriously harmed in this incident. Things like this simply should not be happening in a nuclear facility."

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Notes for editors:

- (1) Herald Scotland, 21st November 2014
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/dounreay-nuclear-plant-fire-caused-release-of-radioactivity.1416566789>
- (2) Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd, 21st November 2014
<http://www.dounreay.com/news/2014-11-21/update-on-pfr-tank-farm-fire-incident>

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