



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2014**

**Why has it taken EDF 9 months to close down Hartlepool and Heysham nuclear reactor after the problem was originally found? NFLA notes over 25% of UK nuclear capacity is now offline.**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities are seeking answers from the nuclear regulator and Electricite de France (EDF) after it transpires that a safety defect, which has led to the temporary closure of reactors at Hartlepool and Heysham nuclear power stations, was originally detected nine months ago.

As an article in 'The Times' confirms, EDF received test results indicating a structural problem with the boiler spine at Heysham 1 nuclear reactor in November 2013. This boiler, which is one of eight in the reactor, had been put out of service since then. 'The Times' goes on to note that EDF waited for the results of "more detailed inspections", which only began in June 2014, before deciding to switch off both reactors at Heysham 1 and two more of the same design at Hartlepool this week. EDF has confirmed it would take around eight weeks to find out whether boilers in these reactors had the same type of cracking. (1)

The closure of Heysham and Hartlepool reactors comes at a time when two other EDF nuclear power stations - Dungeness B and Hunterston B - are also offline due to maintenance and a statutory outage. This accounts to over a quarter of the UK's nuclear capacity. It is fortunate therefore that renewable energy is filling much of the gap – with wind power alone meeting 16% of power demand on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> August for example. (2)

The NFLA is concerned that at no time did EDF give any indication to the local Community Liaison Council at Heysham that there were serious issues with the reactor over the nine months this issue was being investigated. Now four nuclear power reactors are offline for at least two months. The nuclear regulator may be satisfied with EDF's actions, but the NFLA asks why the public is only being told of this issue now.

The seriousness of this issue is also clear from correspondence provided in a reply by the Heysham Station Director to a letter from a concerned local resident. As quoted in the Radiation Free Lakeland website: "I (the local resident) asked the question: 'Would Heysham 1 have to be decommissioned if the anomaly cannot be resolved, i.e. if the fault cannot be rectified?' and the Station Director's answer to me was 'Yes'." (3)

Professor Steve Thomas of Greenwich University noted in 'The Times' that, if a boiler spine fails and water enters the reactor vessel, there might be the potential for an explosion and serious radioactive contamination. Professor Thomas is quoted in the newspaper saying: "Given the safety consequences, it does seem very strange that there was a nine-month gap before announcing the shutdowns."

Professor Thomas also commented that the nuclear regulator, the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), should fully explain why it had permitted reactors of the same design to keep generating after being informed of the safety problem. NFLA agrees with the concerns raised by Professor Thomas.

These continuing issues around nuclear safety alarm NFLA as they appear to be part of ongoing safety problems across the UK's nuclear fleet. For example, the NFLA noted in its media release of the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014, that the nuclear reactor at Dungeness was shut down for five months last year over regulatory concerns with the sea walls, with only vague statements of explanation provided to

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the public. (4) Again, in a NFLA media release on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014 it raised concerns around the cautioning by the nuclear regulator of two workers at the Sellafield facility (rather than the site operators) for undertaking unauthorised work in a part of the site that contains the highly sensitive High Level Waste Storage Tanks (HASTS). (5)

NFLA also remains concerned over an application granted by the ONR to EDF extending the limit on how much degradation can take place to the graphite bricks surrounding the nuclear core at the Dungeness nuclear site. Nuclear radiation causes the graphite bricks to degrade, with the current allowable 'weight loss' limit set at 6.2%. EDF Energy had applied to see this limit extended to 8%, which ONR approved at the end of June 2014. (6)

With the exception of Sizewell B, most of the UK's nuclear reactors are reaching 30 years of age and upwards. Across the 151 nuclear reactors operating in Europe, 98 of them are over 30 years old, with 7 of them over 40 years old. An independent study for Greenpeace International has shown that the increasing age of the reactors also increases the risks of a nuclear incident and ensuing severe economic, social and environmental damage. (7) In the NFLA's view, do we really want to take such risks, whilst having to spend billions to keep these ageing nuclear reactors working?

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"Once again I am concerned to hear about another serious safety issue affecting our ageing nuclear reactors. I call on both EDF and the ONR to explain why it has taken nine months since the fault at the Heysham nuclear reactor 1 was discovered to decide now on taking the drastic step of completely closing down four nuclear reactors at two sites. Is this not clear proof of the urgent need to move away from nuclear power for safe and sustainable renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives?"

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or Pete Roche, NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor on 0131 444 1445.

Notes for editors:

- (1) The Times, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2014  
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/industries/utilities/article4172886.ec>
- (2) Business Green, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2014  
<http://www.businessgreen.com/bq/news/2359626/wind-power-surge-sees-renewables-outstrip-coal>
- (3) Radiation Free Lakeland, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2014  
<http://mariannewildart.wordpress.com/2014/08/11/heyshams-old-boiler-nothing-to-worry-about-says-bbc>
- (4) NFLA Media Release, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA\\_Dungeness\\_and\\_other\\_incidents.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Dungeness_and_other_incidents.pdf)
- (5) NFLA Media Release, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014  
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA\\_Sellafield\\_ONR\\_caution\\_of\\_workers.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Sellafield_ONR_caution_of_workers.pdf)
- (6) Utility Week, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014  
<http://www.utilityweek.co.uk/news/change-to-dungeness-nuclear-safety-rules-approved/1026162>
- (7) Greenpeace International, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
See <http://out-of-age.eu/> for report and  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/nuclear-reaction/ageing-nuclear-reactors-risky-stumbling-block/blog/48400> for commentary.

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