



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 17th February 2015

NFLA share concerns over safety of aging nuclear reactors in the UK and across Europe

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) share today similar concerns as Greenpeace International over the safety of aging nuclear power plants across the world.

In a Greenpeace International media release, they highlight the discovery of thousands of additional cracks found in critical components of two Belgian nuclear reactors – Doel 3 and Tihange 2. The cracks were found in the steel nuclear reactor pressure vessels in nuclear reactors Doel 3 and Tihange 2. The vessels contain the highly radioactive nuclear fuel core. Failure of this component can cause a catastrophic nuclear accident. (1)

It was suggested by two independent material scientists that these cracks could be related to corrosion from normal operations, and this has implications for nuclear power stations around the world. It is important to note the public comment of the Director General of the Belgian nuclear regulator, the Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (FANC), to their comments. He said: ***"This may be a global problem for the entire nuclear industry. The solution is to implement worldwide, accurate inspections of all 430 nuclear power plants."*** (2)

Greenpeace Belgium nuclear campaigner, Eloi Glorieux, said:

"Both the Doel 3 and Tihange 2 reactors have been shutdown since March 24th 2014 after additional tests revealed an unexplained advanced embrittlement of the steel of the test sample. The integrity of the pressure vessel is required to be guaranteed due to the severe accident and radioactive releases that would result if this component were to fail.

As nuclear reactors age, radiation causes pressure vessel damage, or embrittlement, of the steel. According to the statements of the two materials scientists on February 13th, the damage in the Belgian reactors may be partially caused by a problem resulting from the migration of hydrogen into cracks in the steel of the vessel – exacerbating and expanding that cracking. The phenomenon is like a road in winter where water trickles into tiny cracks, freezes, and expands, breaking up the road; it appears that hydrogen from the water within the vessel that cools the reactor core is getting inside the steel, reacting, and destroying the pressure vessel from within."

The NFLA share Greenpeace's concern. NFLA call for the UK nuclear industry and the Office for Nuclear Regulation to urgently consider the matters raised by these critical safety concerns in Belgium.

In December 2014, the NFLA published a report on UK aging nuclear reactors which noted:

- In the three years 2012 - 2014, at least 62 unplanned shutdowns have occurred.
- Poor performances are not evenly spread: the worst performers were Dungeness 'A' & 'B', Heysham 1 & 2, Torness 1 & 2, and Sizewell. Some reactors had no reported unplanned outages – Heysham B2 and Hunterston B1.
- At its lowest point, towards the end of November 2014, less than half (43%) of UK nuclear electricity capacity was available due to shutdowns.
- UK nuclear reactors have such poor operating records that EDF declines to report their performances to nuclear industry publications, unlike most other reactors world-wide.
- Unplanned shutdowns cause serious problems for electricity supply regulation and planning.
- A major likely reason for poor performance is that most reactors are over 30 years old and past their 'sell-by dates', some by considerable margins.

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NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“I am alarmed with the comments made by the Chief Belgian nuclear inspector over the safety of two of Belgium’s aging nuclear reactors. An urgent check of nuclear reactors across the world, and here in the UK, needs to be undertaken. Just last year two of our oldest nuclear reactors in Heysham and Hartlepool were closed for several months due to similar concerns, costing EDF many millions of pounds in repairs, and significantly reduced profits. It is clear to me that the aging nature of the large majority of nuclear power stations in the UK and across the world is putting the public at a greater risk of a serious, if not critical, accident. I call on our nuclear safety regulators to speak to their colleagues in Belgium and consider their findings for the UK context.”

Ends

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

Notes for editors:

- (1) Greenpeace International, 17th February 2015
<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/makingwaves/cracks-in-belgian-reactors/blogs/52138/>
- (2) Belgium Director General of the Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (FANC) Jan Bens as reported on Belgian national TV broadcaster,
<http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/binnenland/1.2238955><http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/binnenland/1.2238955><http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/binnenland/1.2238955>
- (3) NFLA Policy Briefing 127, 9th December 2014
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A241_\(NB127\)_Aging_nuclear_reactors_concerns.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A241_(NB127)_Aging_nuclear_reactors_concerns.pdf)

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