



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 27th October 2014

NFLA asks if our defence nuclear sector is truly safe given Faslane and Coulport released reports and incidents at other defence sites

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) English Forum is alarmed to read of a very long list of serious nuclear safety issues at the Faslane and Coulport nuclear weapons facilities, which follows on from a number of serious nuclear safety incidents at other defence nuclear facilities, including Aldermaston, Devonport, Dounreay and Derby.

The Sunday Herald revealed yesterday a sharp rise in the number of nuclear safety incidents at the Faslane and Coulport naval facilities, which host and maintain the UK's nuclear submarine programme, including Trident nuclear submarines. The Ministry of Defence report, released under the Freedom of Information Act, notes that in the period 2008 - 2013 there have been 316 "nuclear safety events", 2,044 fire alarms and 71 fires at the Faslane and Coulport facilities. There have also been over 3,000 "near miss" industrial accidents, a positive test for illegal drugs and a series of difficulties in dealing with wild animals around the sites. (1)

What concerns the NFLA most is that over half of the 316 "nuclear safety events" had the "potential" to cause radioactive contamination. The report also notes an August 2012 incident when workers were exposed to radiation, though at low levels. The Ministry of Defence has been reprimanded by the nuclear regulatory agencies for this incident.

Defence nuclear safety and nuclear materials transportation concerns were part of the focus of the NFLA English Forum seminar held last Friday (24th October) in Oxford Town Hall. At the seminar, the Research Manager for the Nuclear Information Service, Peter Burt, highlighted a whole range of significant nuclear safety incidents at defence nuclear facilities, including at Devonport (March 2014), Dounreay (January 2012, though only reported in March 2014), Derby (July 2014 and September 2014) and Aldermaston (February 2014, May 2014 and July 2014). It was reported as well that Aldermaston is in 'special regulatory measures' for a second year running.

The recurring themes that the investigation of these incidents uncovered were insufficiently thorough staff training, safety cases not being completely complied with, cost-cutting on certain types of protective equipment and the complexity of nuclear operations. (2)

In a further presentation by Nigel Day of Nukewatch, a litany of potentially serious incidents with the transportation of nuclear weapon convoys by road between Burghfield in Berkshire and Coulport near Helensburgh was also highlighted. (3)

For the NFLA, it is becoming increasingly clear that the following improvements are required in the area of defence nuclear safety:

- There needs to be a greater level of openness and transparency in the defence nuclear sector, with more robust Local Liaison Committees formed, and the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) taking a greater role in the monitoring of defence nuclear sites.
- There needs to be much more robust regulatory action on the Ministry of Defence from the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator and the ONR.
- The Ministry of Defence needs to enforce sanctions for poor performance on its contractors at defence nuclear sites, and review the contractual arrangements with them.
- The UK Government as a whole needs to take on board and fully implement the new European Union nuclear safety directive that follows the international lessons of the Fukushima incident.

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NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“I am alarmed to read the Sunday Herald reports on the large increase of defence safety incidents at Faslane and Coulport in the past 5 years. Added to the incidents reported at our recent NFLA meeting at other defence nuclear sites, and they show a worrying trend across this sector compared to civil nuclear facilities. The Ministry of Defence and the nuclear regulatory agencies need to get to grips with these failings and make rapid improvements. Staff shortages, insufficient training, recurring safety issues and increased incidents over the past 5 years should worry all the communities that live around these sensitive sites. I call on all concerned to get these issues resolved as a matter of real urgency.”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 00 44 (0)161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

- (1) For full Freedom of Information records noted in the Sunday Herald story of the 26th October, go to: <http://www.robedwards.com/2014/10/revealed-316-nuclear-safety-blunders-71-fires-and-a-drug-problem-at-faslane.html>
- (2) Peter Burt, Nuclear Information Service, presentation to the NFLA English Forum, 24th October:
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/events/241014/NIS_Oxford_presentation_241014.pdf
- (3) Nigel Day, Nukewatch, presentation to the NFLA English Forum, 24th October:
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/events/241014/Nukewatch_presentation_Oxford_241014.pdf

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