



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 13th October 2014

The international nuclear safety consequences of Fukushima need to be considered in relation to recent nuclear safety incidents in Scotland and for new nuclear build at Hinkley Point

As the ongoing implications of the European Commission's decision to approve the state aid deal for new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point emerge, and new concerns are raised around the UK's aging nuclear programme, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) raise some alarming issues found by a recent international visit around the Fukushima area.

The delegation, led by the NGO Green Cross International (1), included representatives from England, Scotland and Wales heard from local representatives that more than 25,000 people evacuated from the area around Fukushima are likely never to be able to return home. The delegation was also told that a large swathe of land downwind of the four Fukushima Daiichi reactors is so contaminated by radioactivity that it is highly unlikely that it will be officially 'safe' to return for more than a hundred years. Tens of thousands more who have left their homes outside the most contaminated zone may well also choose never to return because of these dangers. (2)

NFLA has been co-operating with Green Cross International for some time now and assisted them in speaking at a Westminster reception in March 2014 on its work in Japan. Their Fukushima study tour to Japan on 1 - 9 October 2014 included journalist Rob Edwards, Julie Ward MEP and a delegation from four Welsh groups – People Against Wylfa B, CND Cymru, Greenpeace Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith (the Welsh Language Society). Some of these representatives will speak of their observations at upcoming NFLA meetings. (3)

The delegation to Japan also learned that more than 1,600 deaths have been attributed to the nuclear accident by the Japanese authorities, mainly amongst elderly evacuees due to acute stress, suicides or shortages of medical care. It is thought that any long term health damage from the radioactive contamination could take many years to show up.

Such issues matter when considering nuclear safety around the continued operation of the UK's aging nuclear reactor programme and as to whether new nuclear reactors should be built at the likes of Hinkley Point.

In terms of aging UK nuclear reactors (Fukushima Daiichi reactors were over 40 years old), NFLA is alarmed to hear of two serious new safety incidents at Hunterston just days after it was reported that two cracks have been found in the graphite bricks of the reactor. The Sunday Herald newspaper reported that two large gas circulators that are vital for cooling the reactor and preventing its meltdown were badly damaged because a member of staff mistakenly switched off the oil meant to lubricate them. The cost of replacing the circulators could be as much as £100,000. It was also reported that on Thursday 9th October the reactor had to be unexpectedly shut down again, after running for just four days, because its turbine generator was vibrating more than it should.

Last Tuesday morning, 7th October, a fire incident flared up in a sodium store at the Dounreay plant, and is now under investigation by nuclear regulatory agencies. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency is also investigating excessive emissions of tritium, a radioactive gas from the Chapelcross nuclear station. (4)

NFLA Steering Committee Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

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“Three and a half years after the Fukushima disaster we are still hearing of major environmental concerns around this stricken facility. These matter when considering the safety of our own aging nuclear reactors, and of the safety implications in building new nuclear reactors. The reported issues at Hunterston, Dounreay and Chapelcross, along with the fire incident on the Parida vessel transporting nuclear materials from Scotland to Belgium (5), highlights a worrying level of nuclear safety incidents from the UK’s operating and decommissioned nuclear programme. These incidents need to be thoroughly investigated by the nuclear regulator and recommendations put in place quickly. It is a further reason why any moves to build new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point should be developed only after the many issues that arose out of the regulators assessment of the reactor design are fully understood.”

Ends

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

Notes for editors:

- (1) Green Cross International is an environmental non governmental group (NGO) that responds to the combined challenges of security, poverty and environmental degradation in order to ensure a sustainable and secure future. It seeks solutions through dialogue, mediation and co-operation. It has undertaken study tours of the Fukushima area in 2013 and 2014 and has established a number of projects in North East Japan to support evacuated communities. NFLA has been co-operating with Green Cross to promote its work at the Westminster Parliament. For further information on Green Cross to <http://www.gcint.org>
- (2) Sunday Herald, 12th October 2014
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/world-news/fukushima-legacy-25000-who-cannot-go-home-again.25565035>
- (3) Presentations on observations from the Fukushima Study Tour will be held at the NFLA Welsh Forum meeting in Cardiff City Hall on the 7th November and the NFLA Annual Policy Seminar in Edinburgh City Chambers on the 28th November. Further details can be provided by the NFLA Secretary and will appear shortly on the NFLA website <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info>.
- (4) Sunday Herald, 12th October 2014
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/environment/alarm-after-serious-breakdowns-at-ageing-hunterston-nuclear-plant.25565033>
- (5) BBC, 8th October 2014
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-29531395>

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