



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information



NFLA / Stop Hinkley Joint Media release - for immediate release, 12th June 2012 UK Government needs to stop putting unnecessary pressure on the nuclear regulator over approving new nuclear reactor designs

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) and the Stop Hinkley group are urging the UK Government to refrain from putting unnecessary pressure on the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) to speed up its approval of new nuclear reactors in the UK. This appeal comes following additional information suggesting some critical safety measures for nuclear new build may not be dealt with until the final stages of nuclear site licensing, well after the current Generic Design Assessment (GDA) for proposed nuclear reactors has been completed.

This joint media release follows up an independent review of progress by the engineering consultancy Large & Associates in approving the safety of the new design of French nuclear reactors proposed for the UK. The original report concluded that French nuclear utility EDF is well behind schedule, with 30 major issues still to be resolved under the ONR's GDA process (1).

Key conclusions from the Large & Associates assessment of the EPR design approval process included (2):

- The GDA process is significantly behind schedule, is currently not expected to be completed until at least Spring 2013, and will therefore not be ready until after the date EDF is hoping to get planning consent to construct Hinkley Point C from the National Infrastructure Directorate.
- Only 1 out of 31 key GDA issues have been resolved, and that one simply involved a desk-top exercise.
- The EPR is an entirely new design, different to anything built before in the UK, and needs to be assessed carefully and properly.
- Queries raised in the ONR report as a result of Fukushima-related stress tests (3), as well as a whole range of other post-Fukushima issues, have yet to be addressed.
- The ONR is critical of the Areva-EDF responses so far, commenting that some "have been late or do not provide the quality of information or depth of evidence that we expected".

In an update to this initial assessment (4), Large & Associates notes that the ONR has added in a further requirement on EDF-Areva in what they call 'Assessment Findings', which they define as: "Issues / findings for important safety findings identified during the regulators assessment, but not considered critical to the decision to start nuclear island safety related construction of such a reactor...Expectation is that they will be addressed during Phase 2 site specific projects...these assessment findings do not affect the provision of a Final Design Acceptance Confirmation or an interim Statement of Design Acceptability."

Large & Associates report a number of critical safety issues can be found in the Assessment Findings. For example, the GDA Step 4 report examining the structural integrity of the reactor pressure vessel and pressure circuit (RPC) raises 41 'Assessment Findings' that have to be addressed by the time that the RPC is installed at the new nuclear power plant or, later, when the RPC is subjected to 'hot operations'. Large & Associates comment that "resolving these 'Assessment Findings' could result in not insubstantial design changes being required to the physical form of the RPC or, if this is not practicable because the RPC had by then been manufactured and installed, a modification to the safety assessment".

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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The NFLA and Stop Hinkley are concerned such important safety critical matters may therefore be left to a later date rather than in the GDA process, thus allowing the UK Government to get swift initial approval for new nuclear reactor designs and unlock the finance that is required to pay for them. In addition, it reiterates that **no** final approval of the GDA should be issued by the ONR until all the 31 outstanding issues have been totally resolved to the complete satisfaction of the ONR and the Environment Agency and until the manner and robustness of their resolution has been submitted for comment and scrutiny by independent experts. Furthermore, absolutely **no construction** of any part of the site at Hinkley Point should take place until ONR/Environment Agency final approval is given.

The NFLA believe it is absolutely essential that nuclear safety is not compromised in any way, particularly given the wide range of critical safety issues that have also arisen from the Fukushima disaster. NFLA continues to express confidence in the ONR's ability and commitment to ensure that the programme of safety assessment is undertaken at the highest level of professionalism and in a manner which supports their often-stated commitment to openness and transparency. It must resist government pressure to comply with politically driven deadlines.

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said: "This updated report from Large & Associates raises additional concerns that critical safety matters being dealt with through the GDA process may be put off until after approval is given for new build and construction has started. With only 1 of 31 key outstanding issues from the GDA process being addressed so far, I fear that many other issues could be also put off till after initial approval has begun, which most definitely should not be the case. I urge the ONR to robustly stand up to the UK Government and resist pressure for the GDA to be completed to their narrow-minded pro-nuclear aspirations. It goes without saying that I believe the nuclear programme should be abandoned."

Stop Hinkley spokesperson Crispin Aubrey added: "These delays in the design approval process provide further evidence that EDF's plans for nuclear power in the UK are seriously stumbling. It is absolutely imperative that no work is allowed to start on constructing Hinkley C until the reactor design has been fully tested and approved."

Ends

Further information –

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Notes to editors:

- (1) See NFLA / Stop Hinkley joint media release, 1st June 2012, http://nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_PR_GDA_problems_report.pdf
- (2) Large and Associates, 1st Interim review of Generic Design Assessment – Outstanding Issues, 30th May 2012, <http://www.largeassociates.com/cz3206/3206%20GDA%20Review/R3206-I1.pdf>
- (3) ONR / Environment Agency Generic Design Assessment of Proposed New Nuclear Reactors <http://www.hse.gov.uk/newreactors>
- (4) Large and Associates, update to 1st Interim review of Generic Design Assessment – Outstanding Issues, 11th June 2012, <http://www.largeassociates.com/cz3206/3206%20GA%20Review/R3206-I1amended.pdf>

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES