



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 6th July 2012

Fukushima – largely “a man-made disaster” according to Japanese report

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) notes with concern a new definitive official Japanese report on the Fukushima disaster that concludes that it is fundamentally as much a man-made disaster as due to the effects of the earthquake and the tsunami that hit North East Japan on March 11th 2011 (1).

Key points of the report of the independent panel on the Fukushima disaster include:

- The crisis was the result of "a multitude of errors and willful negligence", by the government, safety officials and the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power [Tepco].
- "Its fundamental causes," the panel wrote, "are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: reflexive obedience; reluctance to question authority; devotion to 'sticking with the programme'; its insularity.
- The panel said the magnitude-9 earthquake that preceded the tsunami could not be ruled out as a cause of the accident.
- "Across the board, the commission found ignorance and arrogance unforgivable for anyone or any organisation that deals with nuclear power. We found a disregard for global trends and a disregard for public safety."
- The "direct intervention" of the Prime Minister in the early days of the incident created confusion over the incident chain of command.
- Tepco, regulators and the Japanese Government had "failed to correctly develop the most basic safety requirements, such as assessing the probability of damage, preparing for containing collateral damage from such a disaster, and developing evacuation plans for the public in the case of a serious radiation release".
- Again, "since 2006, the regulators and Tepco were aware of the risk that a total outage of electricity at the Fukushima Daiichi plant might occur if a tsunami were to reach the level of the site."

This report highlights a consistent issue the NFLA have raised since the Fukushima disaster occurred - that despite a terrible natural disaster it was man-made factors that were largely at the heart of the radiation leak and the exacerbation of the incident over the crucial first few days following the collapse of the reactors.

Despite the confident claims made by the UK Government and the nuclear industry that such events would not happen in the UK, the long-list of issues raised in the UK nuclear industry stress tests report clearly suggests that there is much that still needs to be learnt from Fukushima (2). The NFLA urges the Government, the nuclear regulatory agencies and the nuclear industry to closely study this report and extrapolate key learning points for a UK context.

The report also highlights the inherent risks of nuclear power and that there are safer, renewable energy alternatives. Indeed, for example, Germany has reached a new world record 14.7 Terawatt hours of solar energy in the first six months of 2012 (3).

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said:

"This report sets out in detail key systemic problems in nuclear safety in Japan which was cruelly exposed in the Fukushima disaster. It shows why Japan should not restart its own nuclear power programme and why the UK should also plot a quite different new energy course. Though earthquakes and tsunamis can't be stopped, new nuclear programmes can. That is what we must do."

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Notes to editors:

- (1) A summary of the Japanese report can be found on the BBC News website, 5th July 2012.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18718486>
- (2) See NFLA media release on stress test report, 17th May 2012,
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Sellafield_stress_tests.pdf
- (3) Inhabitat, 'Germany produces record-breaking 14.7 Terawatt-hours of solar energy in six months', 5th July 2012.
<http://inhabitat.com/germany-sets-another-world-record-for-solar-power>

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