



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 11th November 2014

NFLA ask how many other radium tipped dials and radioactive materials were dumped in the open seas, or remain in sites across the UK?

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) has read with concern the 'Sunday Post' article which highlights the level of historic nuclear waste that was dumped into the seas, particularly defence related nuclear materials, which is of direct relevance given the recent issues in decontaminating the Dalgety Bay site in Fife.

The 'Sunday Post' reported on archive files they had uncovered which show more than 75,000 luminised radium dials were tipped into the Tay Estuary after the Second World War. The files released note, that from the 1950s onwards, radioactive waste from a Dundee radio valve plant was secretly dropped into the waters below the Forth Bridge, very close to the Dalgety Bay site in Fife.

The reports of these and other incidents around Scottish sites, including Rosyth, Balloch and Garroch Head, highlight the lack of adequate environmental management in dealing with radioactive materials that took place in the early decades of the nuclear industry. Dumping such materials at sea is thankfully no longer permitted. The NFLA supports the comments made by Friends of the Earth Scotland that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and other public health agencies should investigate these matters and constantly maintain detailed environmental studies of dumping sites on land and the open seas. (1)

In its October 2013 study on the radium legacy in Scotland and the wider UK, the NFLA identified a long list of other sites of concern beyond Dalgety Bay where radioactive contamination from past military or industrial activity could pose an environmental or public health risk. These included: (2)

- Ministry of Defence firing range, Dundrennan, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway;
- Former Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank, Perth and Kinross;
- Royal Artillery Range, RAF Benbecula, Western Isles;
- Former air base, RAF Edzell, Angus;
- Former air base, RAF Kinloss, Forres, Morayshire;
- Former air base, RAF Machrihanish, Mull of Kintyre;
- Royal Marines base, RM Condor, Arbroath, Angus;
- Former army luminising depot, Forthside, Stirling;
- Former radium plant, Gowkthrapple, Wishaw, North Lanarkshire;
- Boatyard on site of an old radium works, Balloch, Dunbartonshire;
- Beaches near the Dounreay nuclear complex, Caithness;
- RAF Pelham in Norfolk – radium contamination has been confirmed by the local authority;
- Chatham Dockyard, Kent – MoD confirmed that 0.95GBq of Carbon-14 had been buried;
- Eskmeals, Cumbria – Depleted Uranium Weapons Firing Test Centre;
- Hilsea, Portsmouth, Hampshire – disposal of radium residues;
- As many as 14 former Second World War airfields in Pembrokeshire or the naval bases at Milford Haven Waterway could also have some radioactive material contamination. (3)

NFLA urges the Ministry of Defence, Public Health England, SEPA and the Environment Agency to continue to work with local authorities to investigate the potential extent of radioactive material contamination at such sites, and agree on effective decontamination strategies to mitigate the public health risk.

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

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“I commend the Sunday Post for publishing archived information on the dreadfully poor environmental management of radioactive materials that took place in the decades after the Second World War. I call on all the public and environmental health agencies to undertake thorough investigation into radioactive materials dumped at sea, and what may still exist on land at a long list of sites around Scotland, England and Wales. The length of this list confirms to me that significant clean-up of many sites is urgently required. Given the estimated £10 million it will cost to clean up Dalgety Bay the question has to be asked as to the extent and costs of the clean-up that could still exist in many other contaminated sites. It is clear evidence to me of the significant social, economic, public health and environmental damage that has taking place after sixty years of the nuclear age.”

Ends

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

Notes for editors:

- (1) Sunday Post, 9th November 2014
<http://www.sundaypost.com/news-views/scotland/radioactive-coast-our-probe-reveals-alarming-amount-of-toxic-waste-dumped-at-sea-1.673210>
- (2) NFLA Radioactive Waste Briefing 42, October 2013, 'The Radium Legacy and Other Contamination Problems'
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/Rad_Waste_Brfg_Dalgety_Bay_%26_the_wider_radium_legacy.pdf
- (3) NFLA Media Release, 15th October 2013
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/news/NFLA_Welsh_MOD_radium_sites.pdf

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