



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

Media release - for immediate release, 16th June 2010

How safe are our nuclear material shipments going through the Irish Sea?

The UK and Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) today issues a policy briefing which highlights real concerns over the emergency planning arrangements for nuclear material shipments across the Irish Sea.

The NFLA Policy Briefing (1) provides an analysis of information provided to it by the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) about the emergency planning arrangements for an 'at sea' incident involving a shipment of radioactive materials through the Irish Sea and beyond. The analysis of the MCA response has been undertaken for the NFLA by the independent marine pollution consultant Tim Deere-Jones. It follows on from ongoing discussion and presentations to the NFLA All-Ireland Forum.

Some of the key points that can be gleaned from the correspondence include:

- Nuclear shipments containing radioactive materials would be treated in the same manner as other dangerous cargo. The MCA's National Contingency Plan (NCP) does not seek to describe every action that would be taken, because each incident would be risk assessed and the response would be tailored to the assessed risk.
- **However, despite the MCA claims that the NCP is a generic and overarching guidance document, the NFLA notes that the NCP does contain no less than 30 paragraphs SPECIFICALLY describing a variety of technologies and strategies for containment, collection, handling, cleaning up and treatment of spilled oil but NO paragraphs related to similar such technologies and strategies for response to a radioactive incident.**
- The NFLA are concerned that there may be no specific risk assessment matrices for incidents involving radioactive cargos.
- It appears from the correspondence that the MCA is NOT the lead agency with regard to the construction of contingency plans for ships carrying INF radioactive materials.
- It also appears the MCA does not have sufficient expertise to draw up such plans and is therefore unlikely to have sufficient expertise to operate any relevant counter pollution or salvage operations under it's own initiative.
- In regard to contingency planning the MCA is therefore reliant on the producers/shippers of the radioactive cargo and this casts considerable doubt on the MCA claim that it is the lead agency responsible for counter pollution operations in the event of a radioactive cargo incident.
- The evidence, so far acquired from the MCA, provides no practical or specific details of any counter pollution or salvage planning (operated by the MCA) relevant to maritime incidents involving radioactive cargo.
- There appears to be few emergency planning exercises organised involving local authorities that have a scenario involving a radioactive materials shipment.

This should be seen in context with concerns of a recent troubled shipment of vitrified High Level Waste (HLW) from Sellafield to Holland in March this year (2). Operators of the nuclear cargo vessel fleet International Nuclear Services (INS) containing 28 canisters of vitrified HLW was delayed and the canisters arrived in Vlissingen in Holland being 'out of position' within the holding channels of the transport flask.

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NFLA Chair Bailie George Regan commented:

“I am alarmed that there appears to be a general lack of information in contingency planning and not a lot of emergency planning training held in relation to the transport of radioactive materials by sea. The recent safety concerns of the Atlantic Osprey’s transport from Barrow to the Netherlands shows the NFLA are right to be concerned that emergency planning for nuclear material shipments should be maintained at the highest standard with the full involvement of the emergency services and local authorities. We have written again to the MCA looking for clarification to our concerns and will pursue this issue with vigour till we are satisfied that a safe emergency planning regime is in place.”

Tim Deere-Jones added:

“Coastal citizens, their elected representatives, and members of the NFLA are not well served by the apparent lack of a rigorous and transparent contingency planning regime for potential maritime accidents involving radioactive cargo.”

The NFLA are planning to develop an autumn seminar on nuclear emergency planning issues considering the likes of nuclear materials transportation, fixed site emergency planning and preparing for terrorist attacks using nuclear materials.

Ends

Further information

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Notes to Editors:

(1) NFLA Policy Briefing 75 is available with this media release or from the NFLA Secretariat.

(2) CORE press release –

<http://www.corecumbria.co.uk/newsapp/pressrelease/pressmain.asp?StrNewsID=279>

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