

Nuclear Information Service

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To: All members of the Atomic Weapons Establishment Local Liaison Committee

23 April 2012

Dear Local Liaison Committee member,

Atomic Weapons Establishment: Emergency Planning arrangements

I am writing to you as a member of the Atomic Weapons Establishment Local Liaison Committee on behalf of Nuclear Information Service to inform you about a recent study into emergency planning arrangements for the Atomic Weapons Establishment conducted by Large & Associates, independent nuclear consulting engineers.

At our request, Large & Associates reviewed the application of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 (REPPIR) at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. REPPIR is the principal legislation relating to emergency planning at nuclear sites, and you will recall that presentations on this issue were given at the March meeting of the Local Liaison Committee.

Large & Associates make the following points in their report which are particularly relevant to the Local Liaison Committee:

- The current detailed emergency planning zones for AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield, with radii of 3 km and 1.5 km respectively, compare poorly with the much larger zones applied at the US Pantex nuclear weapons plant, which has a similar function to AWE Burghfield, and the 20 km radial zone evacuated in the aftermath of the emergency at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.
- Hazard Identification and Risk Evaluation (HIRE) reports required by REPPIR which have been prepared in the past are vague and fail to identify the nature and severity of potential accident scenarios, and emergencies resulting from acts of terrorism at AWE appear not to have been taken into account in risk assessments because they are not considered to be reasonably foreseeable.
- As a result, the process for establishing emergency planning zones at AWE sites is untransparent and appears arbitrary and it is unclear whether the current size of the zones is adequate to provide an appropriate level of protection to the public.

A copy of the report from Large & Associates accompanies this letter with a full commentary on REPPIR at AWE sites. John Large of Large & Associates is willing to attend a meeting of the Local Liaison Committee to present the report and answer questions about his findings if requested to do so by Committee members.

In the light of the Fukushima nuclear emergency, the Site Stakeholder Group at the Sizewell nuclear power station has asked the site operator, local authorities, and the Office for Nuclear Regulation to review whether the size of the detailed emergency planning zone at Sizewell is adequate (see <http://tinyurl.com/cjw3j5x>). I am therefore writing to ask that the AWE Local Liaison Committee takes a similar step to help ensure that emergency planning arrangements for AWE sites meet similar standards to those in the USA and Japan.

Nuclear Information Service would also like to arrange a joint public / Local Liaison Committee meeting later this year to provide local residents with the opportunity to question John Large of Large & Associates about the study. It would be helpful if you could advise me whether you would wish to attend such a meeting.

Thank you for giving this matter your attention, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours faithfully,

[signed on original]

Peter Burt
Nuclear Information Service