

Nuclear Information Service

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Andrew Jupp
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Dear Mr Jupp,

Fire at AWE Aldermaston, 3 August 2010

I am writing to enquire about a recent report in the 'Observer' newspaper about the fire at AWE Aldermaston earlier this month ('Nuclear arsenals under scrutiny for safety lapses, fires and flood'. 22 August 2010).

The report states that "The *Observer* has established that the fire resulted in asbestos contamination at the base. A spokeswoman for AWE confirmed that "sampling of the site found small amounts of asbestos close to the building where the fire took place" but said neither staff nor the public had been affected. "The asbestos is being dealt with in accordance with established safety procedures," she added."

To date AWE has made no pro-active public announcement on potential risks associated with the possibility of a release of asbestos resulting from the fire. Whilst we appreciate that AWE does not want to alarm local people – a goal that we share - we think the best way forward in such situations is for the company to be open about what has happened and show that everything possible is being done to remediate the situation, rather than keep quiet about it.

I should therefore be grateful if you would answer the following questions about the fire and about asbestos at the AWE site:

- How much asbestos was considered to be released as a result of the fire on 3 August, and what type of asbestos was this?
- Did the fire result in asbestos contamination above the control limit specified in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/2739), and if so in which areas and at what levels? Is there any indication that contamination may have spread beyond AWE's perimeter fence?

- If the fire has resulted in the exposure of asbestos, what steps are being taken to isolate, seal, and decontaminate areas where asbestos is considered to pose a potential risk?
- What steps have been taken to establish whether personnel from AWE and responding agencies involved in fighting the fire have been exposed to levels of asbestos contamination greater than those permitted in the Asbestos Regulations? What steps have been taken to inform personnel who may have been exposed to higher than desirable levels and to advise them on action necessary to safeguard their health?
- What steps has AWE taken to establish whether there is any risk to the public and, if necessary, inform any groups who may be at risk?
- Will the issues relating to release of asbestos during the fire be addressed in the inquiries which AWE and the Health and Safety Executive are mounting into the incident?
- Has AWE compiled an asbestos register for buildings on its sites?
- Does AWE have a written policy on dealing with large scale fires involving asbestos?

Thank you for giving this matter your attention, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Burt
Nuclear Information Service