

## **Model Letter for Emergency Planning Officers**

Address

Date

Dear

### **Nuclear Warhead Convoys and Continuous Running**

We are concerned at a change in policy by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to transport nuclear warheads through the night. Daytime running has been the norm for 50 years of nuclear weapons road transport. However, recently, the MOD, through its contractor AWE ML, changed this policy when delivering warheads from the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and Burghfield near Reading in Berkshire to the service base that operates them at Coulport in Argyll & Bute.

The changes emerged from Minutes of a meeting of the MOD Police and Guarding Agency on 19 April 2004, when the meeting agreed that the arrangements to achieve continuous running would be in place by November 2004.

According to MOD safety guidance to local authorities, the warheads contain plutonium and uranium, which are both toxic and radioactive.

"In the very unlikely event of a nuclear weapon accident involving the release of radioactive material, it is the release of plutonium into the environment which presents the dominant radiation hazard." (Local Authority and Emergency Service Information, December 2004, paragraph 4.2)

### **Risk Assessment**

The changes being undertaken by the MOD are believed to reflect a high risk assessment of the terrorist threat. But motorways, highways and local streets are hazardous at night when scheduled road works plus other road repairs and vehicle recoveries are carried out. Training for this 500-mile dash may give a false sense of security and road traffic accidents remain the greatest hazard. Continuous and Dark Running add rather than reduce risk. The contribution to safety afforded by a motorcycle outrider escort is diminished at night because of light dazzle, and it may be withdrawn for that reason.

### **No Military Control**

In March 2002 Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) took over the control of warhead transport from the RAF Regiment. The MDP have been tasked to achieve what the RAF could not, or would not perform: continuous and dark running.

For many years the nuclear warhead convoys used an eastern route mainly relying on the A1(M), but now they are using the M6 Motorway from Junction T5 to 44. Many new Councils, Police Services, Fire Services, Health Authorities and communities will be affected.

### **Nukewatch Experience**

Nukewatch has been monitoring the warhead transport for many years, and considers that stress on the crew is significant, especially when a breakdown occurs and the journey time is extended.

Training on a military base does not reproduce the reality of a breakdown or accident in darkness on the road.

Nukewatch takes its responsibility seriously. While these convoys are highly visible to all road users, Nukewatchers are among the few observers outside government who understand this issue. We are concerned for the safety of the general public, the MDP and the civil police. We worry about the danger to the public and the Emergency Services personnel should an incident or accident occur.

Nukewatch has a view on how these convoys should be managed, and that assumes military control and daylight running. Convoy speed should be reduced and the road ahead cleared. This process would enable all warheads to be moved back to AWE Burghfield for decommissioning. No further warheads should be transported out of AWE, thus removing the risk for good.

### **Questions**

We would therefore like to ask you the following questions:

1. How is a response to an incident involving nuclear weapons convoys integrated into emergency planning?
2. On the understanding that the MOD will be the dominant player in responding to an incident, what arrangements are in place to ensure that interaction between MOD roles and LEA roles will be effective?
3. What measures are planned to inform and consult with the public on potential incidents involving warhead and nuclear materials convoys?
4. You may be aware that the REPPiR regulations make it mandatory for a local authority to engage in proactive communication with its public in relation to radiological sites in its boundaries or rail transport of radiological materials within its boundaries. Would you agree that in principle the issues with warhead convoys on the road are identical, and that in the spirit of the regulations a local authority should respond in the same way as it is obliged to if a fixed site is within its jurisdiction?

We would be pleased to arrange to meet with you and any relevant colleagues to discuss these issues, and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely