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Subject: Nuclear Emergecny Meeting Plymouth

Dear John,

Here are my notes on the meeting which took place in November.

Plymouth nuclear Dump Information Group DIG

Community Liaison Meeting (second in series)
Nuclear Accident Procedures
Held at Barne Barton Primary School, St. Budeaux
Plymouth
7.30 pm 12th November 1996
Meeting duration approx. 2.5 hrs

Panel

Chair - Cllr Eleanor Cohen
Peter Smith - PCC Emergency Officer (he said nothing throughout meeting)
Peter Barnes - Assistant to PCC Emergency Officer (he said nothing)
Police Chief Inspector (he said nothing)
Captain Peter Hurford RN - Chief Staff Officer Submarine Safety
Lt. Comm. David Yates RN - Base Accident Response Officer
Dr. Gina Radford - Director of Public Health, South & West Devon Health
Authority

Cllr. Cohen introduced panel.

Introduced Cpt. Hurford who gave a lengthy presentation on base safety, refits, movement of spent fuel, storage of rad. waste - very little on what we had come to listen to, arrangements in the event of a nuclear accident. He appeared to "fill-time" on subjects that were not particularly relevant to the meeting (although of interest to DIG!).

Dr. Radford then gave another lengthy, dry, presentation. No details on were given on emergency plans and was a recap of what the Health Authority had decided (without public consultation) what to do in regards to Potassium Iodate Tablet (PIT) distribution.

Notes taken of meeting

Hurford said Vanguard first refit scheduled for 2001.

By 1998 all Swiftsure's to be refitted at Devonport.

Hurford said PIT's had to be taken "before or relatively soon after a radiation event, within 5 hours" (he had previously said within 1 hour, but it is likely that he now realises this is not possible)

By statute, Navy had to inform public on what to do in a nuclear emergency (PIRER requirements)

Navy had commissioned a "commercial distribution company" (Northcliffe Distribution) to give out PIRER leaflets and Health Authority questionnaire.

Hand delivered through peoples door with free advertising paper (Plymouth Extra).

Hurford said they knew the booklet distribution had "not been 100%".

Distribution company did not deliver Extra to some streets as a matter of practice (streets with flats etc.).

Navy had commissioned a survey from the University of Plymouth to see how many houses were delivered to. He had with him the University's interim report.

Report had concentrated on 6 streets and based on responses concluded that c. 40% of households had not been aware of the PIRER booklet or Health Authorities questionnaire for applying for PIT's.

Those streets that Navy knew were missed have been delivered to.

Hurford spoke about proposed "considerable increase" in nuclear licensed site.

Mentioned recent earthquake in Cornwall and said caissons and docks have had to be strengthened at considerable expense to meet Nil's seismic requirements.

Those facilities and buildings not corresponding to current seismic requirements would have to be removed (!).

New concrete submarine cradles had been built in current dry docks to prevent a sub. from keeling over in dock should caissons fail or earthquake cause movement.

All ILW drums had been moved out to a storage pen at the back of the current waste storage building.

Hurford said 23 drums (Resin Catch Tanks) were being temporarily stored while construction of new store takes place.

Hurford had to admit that a further 14 RCT's worth of ILW was also being stored in 7 old Magnox flasks at the front of the Central Office Building at the Submarine Refit Complex.

Hurford spoke about removal of spent fuel on rail lines. Said there was only likely to be 1 remaining movement this year.

When asked, he did not know when purpose built flasks would be available and they were still having to use modified NTL flasks.

Hurford mentioned decommissioned subs. at Devonport.

Mentioned Conqueror, Warspite and Courageous but failed to mention Valiant.

Hurford said he did not know what was to happen to them in the future but still thought they would be cut up and sent to the proposed deep depository at Sellafield.

New sirens (4) were still not in place and Hurford blamed the city council's planning process (first we had heard of this).

Hurford spoke about use of 200 navy personnel who would be used to distribute PIT's in the event of an accident.

He said they would not be trained and would not be wearing protective clothing or equipment. He failed to confirm if personnel would be asked or ordered to distribute tablets.

Team leaders would instruct navy personnel where to deliver tablets.

Hurford would not be more explicit on details of distribution and side-stepped all detailed questions.

Hurford said that it was possible for radiation to spread further than the 2 km pre-planned zone, but they were not required to plan further than 2 km.

He said local authorities were not told about spent fuel movements in case the news got out to protest groups who may disrupt the transportation.

Only the police were told of movements, not the fire brigade or local authorities Emergency Officer.

Dr. Radford said it was Health Authorities obligation to draw up PIT's distribution plans under Health Guidance Notes HSG(93)24.

She said PIT's were drugs that could not be prescribed by GP's.

They had possible serious side effects and if too many were swallowed by children serious illness could result.

5-7 tablets taken by a baby would be enough to give serious health damage.

Radford said distribution at the time of an incident was the "bedrock" of safety measures and so this was considered the most important factor.

She admitted that she wished to encourage residents to hold their own stocks of PIT's.

Did not agree that leaflet distribution was a disaster.

She said c. 3500 had responded to tablet requests.

7 people had said they didn't want them (out of possible 60,000)

1 shop had indicated that they would be prepared to distribute tablets

Radford said distribution plans were based on those at Liverpool but failed to say why and how the two sites were comparable.

She said the town of Torpoint across the River Tamar had been pre-distributed tablets because they navy could not deliver tablets in time - though she offered no evidence.

DIG's observations

We thought that the meeting was useful because the Navy had been obliged to face up to a number of important points and it revealed their weaknesses. The lack of detail on the PIT distribution indicated that plans were still not fully formulated. It was clear that the Health Authority had little idea of the Navy's distribution plans. The Navy appeared particularly nervous on questions about their radioactive plume predictions. Their plans hinge on being able to predict and determine the plume. If this was questioned, their plans would be in serious doubt.

It was apparent that the leaflet distribution had not been successful which had prompted the Navy to hide behind a very unscientific study by the University (they will have used undergraduate students on a set project) The survey was crude and was poorly undertaken with any conclusions remaining unclear and certainly suspect. What is clear is that many households never received their PIRER booklet or offer to have PIT's should they want them. The remaining distribution plans seemed to be a disorganised mixture of ideas which were merely paper plans and had limited chance of success in practice.

The Navy were more open than on previous occasions, but remained secretive on many issues - they would not even trust giving information to the city council's emergency officer.

The next meeting was scheduled for 6 months time.

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