



Press Releases - Time for Sellafield to go - 24/12/00

Time for Sellafield to go

Councillor Costello stated that 2000 was a black year for Sellafield as the litany of problems at the plant continued and this at a time when the world witnessed the final closure of Chernobyl in December at a cost of \$768 million and unquantifiable human cost to the people of a large area around the plant.

The last year has seen the sacking of the director of the Sellafield plant and other senior personnel in February as a result of the falsification of safety records at the plant, a damning report in March from the UK industry's own Nuclear Safety Inspectorate, falsification of safety data on export orders which led the Japanese to cancel their order with Sellafield in May and in December a critical report from the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland.

Councillor Costello has placed a number of motions before the Council for January meetings with the objective of securing the closure of Sellafield nuclear reprocessing facility. One motion calls on junior minister Joe Jacob to redouble his efforts to bring about the closure of the plant. His second motion calls on the Council to establish contact with the Council responsible for the county where Sellafield is located and to communicate to them Dun Laoghaire Rathdown

citizens' deep concerns about the plant.

A recent report (released December 2000) from the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland will give people living along the east coast cause for concern. The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland completed a study of the safety of one of the most dangerous plants at Sellafield, the assembly of tanks holding liquid high-level radioactive waste, known as the Highly Active Storage Tanks or HASTs. The quantity of radioactive material in these tanks is such that an accident involving a major release to the atmosphere could have serious consequences at a considerable distance from the plant.

The RPII was given unprecedented access by the plant's operators, BNFL, earlier this year to detailed information about the safety of the tanks. Their study found that while the likelihood of a serious

accident in the HASTs is low, there are a number of actions BNFL could and should take to make this risk even lower including;

- BNFL should provide itself with more accurate and up-to-date information on the reliability of individual plant components.
- Alternative water supplies for tank cooling are not fully independent of each other.
- Instrumentation for the detection of possible hydrogen build-up should be installed.
- Random checking of plant personnel for alcohol or drug abuse should be introduced.
- The consequences of a very severe accident, if one did occur, have not been adequately assessed.

In March a UK nuclear safety inspectorate report on Sellafield highlighted the problem of nuclear waste storage stating that the high level waste tanks pose a serious risk to the east coast of Ireland because of the possible release of a large amount of radiation should the cooling tanks overheat. The Irish report later in the year also emphasised the inherent risks associated with the storage of high-level radioactive waste in liquid form. A long-term programme to convert the material to a much safer solid form is in progress but it is unclear at what stage this process will be completed.

The potential risks of accident involving the storage tanks is exacerbated by the findings of the Irish team, who found that alternative water supplies for tank cooling are not fully independent of each other with the potential of failure in the case of an accident.

The UK Inspector's report also found that the amount of high-level liquid waste continues to increase faster than BNFL can deal with it. The inspectorate has threatened legal sanctions if the backlog of liquid waste is not cleared.

All the above developments have taken place against a backdrop of an international move away from nuclear power due to continued accidents and problems in disposing of waste. In October in Japan six employees of a nuclear plant operator in Tokyo were arrested for negligence resulting in the death of two employees by illegally changing the safety manual to cut costs. Ospar, the convention on marine pollution based around the north east Atlantic, passed a motion calling on Sellafield to cease its reprocessing activities. In 2000 Germany put a hold on any future development of nuclear plants in its country.

In May Councillor Costello collected a petition of over 280 signatures calling for the closure of Sellafield. Sellafield carries out

the dirty and dangerous business of cleaning up the spent nuclear fuel of nuclear plants around the world. He stated that there is a deep-seated desire from people in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown for the closure of the plant for the sake of the future generations growing up in the county.