



10 DOWNING STREET

CF
b of for meeting
on 24 July pre.
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17/7

Prime Minister ⁽²⁾

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(SELLAFIELD)

Sir Douglas Black's report
is imprecise and not at
all reasoning.

You will wish to discuss
handling at your
Sellafield meeting on
24 July.

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16/7

MR BARCLAY16 July 1984THE BLACK REPORT

The report concludes that there is an incidence of leukaemia among young people in Seascale which is unusual, statistically significant but not unparalleled. The report is not able to say with certainty that this is or is not due to the radioactive discharges at Sellafield, but gives a qualified reassurance on the possible health hazard to those people living near Sellafield.

However, the report also notes that there are uncertainties concerning the operation of the plant and questions concerning the adequacy of controls on present permitted levels for discharges.

This is an unsatisfactory outcome which will not reassure public opinion. However, it would have been surprising if Sir Douglas Black had been able to come to any other conclusion.

The report shows that background radiation would be expected to cause 0.5 deaths from leukaemia among young people under the age of 20 living in Seascale since 1955. Additional radiation exposure from the known discharges from Sellafield would be expected to cause less than 0.1 further deaths. In fact 4 deaths from leukaemia were observed during this period.

In other words, the direct evidence does not incriminate Sellafield. But as the report points out, we shall never know the actual doses received by those children subsequently contracting leukaemia. In addition one cannot completely exclude the possibility of unplanned discharges which were not detected by the monitoring programmes and yet delivered a significant dose to humans by an unsuspected route.

In this context it is disturbing that BNFL have reported 14 incidents at Sellafield between 1952 and 1983 involving abnormal releases of radioactivity into the environment. It is not reassuring to be told that apart from the Windscale fire in 1957, none is believed to have resulted in significant exposure to the public.

Sir Douglas Black makes 10 recommendations. We agree with Norman Fowler in his paper for H Committee tomorrow that the Government should accept all of these.

However, even this will not reassure the public. Of the 10 recommendations, 7 are for further studies and research work. A further 2 are implicit criticisms of the

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way authorisation limits are applied and the way in which controls and monitoring procedures are co-ordinated.

The recommendation which is likely to receive most public attention is that there should be a critical review of the necessity for discharges from Sellafield to be significantly in excess of those from similar plants in other countries. This is one of the essential questions which the Prime Minister's meeting on Sellafield next week will address. It re-emphasises that the most effective way of restoring public confidence in Sellafield is to ensure that the operation of the plant is acceptable and defensible.

The Government's response to Sir Douglas Black's report will therefore need to take account of conclusions reached during the Prime Minister's meeting.

DLP.

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