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**Health &
Safety
Executive**

Regina House
259 Old Marylebone Road
London NW1 5RR
Telephone 01-723 1262 ext 325
(after 5.30 pm 01-723 4621)
Telex 25683

From the Office of the Director General

19 February 1986

Nigel Wickes Esq
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Nigel,

.... Herewith the press notice that we are issuing
this afternoon.

X / In accordance with your request, copies have been
sent to Lobby Correspondents.

Handwritten signature of J D Rimington

J D RIMINGTON
Director General HSE

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- for would want
it to be lobby.*

*NLU.
19.2*



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Safety
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Regina House
259/269 Old Marylebone Road
London NW1 5RR
Telephone 01 723 3418

**News
Release**

19 February 1986

SELLAFIELD: HSE ANNOUNCES DETAILED SAFETY AUDIT

Mr John Rimington, Director General of the Health and Safety Executive said, "We are going to carry out a house-keeping exercise, an audit, at Sellafield. Sellafield is a big and complicated house, where important tasks are going on. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate inspect the plant and assess future designs on a day-to-day basis. That is a kind of sampling. Every now and then it is necessary to stand back and look comprehensively and in depth at the important operations. That is what we are now going to do."

The Audit will cover operating and maintenance procedures and their effectiveness, and will also extend to a systematic examination of those parts of the reprocessing Plant B205 which have implications for safety. The implementation of the recommendations of the Executive's 1981 review of Management of Safety at the site will be examined.

The Audit will be carried out on the Executive's behalf by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, assisted for certain purposes by the Executive's Accident Prevention Advisory Unit.

The Executive said today that it was timely and necessary that they should satisfy themselves by a thorough and systematic examination that the plant is being operated and maintained to the highest standards consistent with its design. The Audit will concentrate on the process plant but its lessons are likely to be more widely applicable. It will draw upon operating records and the Inspectorate's own accumulated experience since the plant was licensed in 1971.

The findings of the Audit will be made public.

More.../

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Sellafield plant was designed and built in successive stages between twenty and thirty years ago. A large investment in new plant is underway. It became licensed when it was hived off from the AEA in 1971, upon the formation of British Nuclear Fuels Limited. It reprocesses spent fuel from the magnox power stations, the spent fuel being at first stored in cooling ponds and then processed in B205 to separate the fission products from the re-usable isotopes of uranium and plutonium. Certain low level radioactive wastes are authorised by the Department of the Environment and MAFF to be discharged to sea and air. The licensing authority for the site is the Health and Safety Executive.

2. There have been some recent incidents, widely reported in the national press affecting safety in the plant. Respectively there have been (i) an incident in the reprocessing plant B205 on 5 February which resulted in the contamination of a number of workers and which is still under investigation by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate; and (ii) the fracture of a pipe leading to the discharge of low activity pond water on 18 February. In addition, there was a discharge of uranium to sea on 23 January, which followed an operational malfunction.

3. Safety Audit is a concentrated examination of a plant or process. It is a systematic extension of routine inspection and assessment of particular parts. Though the processes carried out at Sellafield are simple enough, the need for a high level of radiation protection and safety means that the design is complex. The number of separate installations is also large. The proposed audit is expected to take not less than six months to complete and will engage about a dozen inspectors.

4. The Nuclear Inspectorate will be in charge of the Audit. The Accident Prevention Advisory Unit (APAU) of the HSE which will be assisting them, specialises in the examination of management systems and gives advice to substantial companies.