

PRIME MINISTER

COMARE

The report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, on new information on discharges from Sellafield in the 1950s not available to the Black Advisory Group, is planned for publication on Tuesday. *The report is attached, but you do not need to read it unless you wish to.*

COMARE was set up following a Black report (1984) recommendation. This will be its first report. Black, which looked at the increased incidence of cancer in West Cumbria, concluded that the radiation released from Sellafield/Windscale was not responsible for the observed incidence of leukaemia in Seascale. Since then new information on discharges from the plant has come to light.

The main new evidence comes from Dr. Jakeman, and stems from his detection of high radiation levels in his garden in 1954/5. BNFL have also reviewed their information on discharges.

The report notes

- There were substantial releases of radioactivity from Sellafield in the early 1950s, of which the Black Group were not aware.
- It is still not possible to be sure that all releases have now been recognised.
- The doses between 1950 and 1980 are still well below the doses estimated to have been received by the population from natural background radiation and nuclear weapons testing fallout combined.
- None of the estimates of the increased leukemia risk arising out of discharges is sufficient to explain the observed leukaemia rate.



- The substance and essential conclusions of the Black report therefore remain unchanged.
- It is unlikely to be possible to establish whether there is a relationship between leukaemia in Seascale and discharges from Sellafield.
- The report also advises that Government should satisfy itself as to the adequacy of the current monitoring programme.

The report comes at an unfortunate time, after Chernobyl. It will be helpful to those wishing to scare people about nuclear power and about Sellafield in particular. They will be able to point to the fact that discharges have been more than were admitted to, and that monitoring was loose. But of course all this is 30 years ago, since when the inspection and monitoring of nuclear sites has been significantly improved. The Government has reacted openly and promptly to the Jakeman evidence by asking COMARE for advice on the implications of the new data, and will be publishing it without delay. The announcement will make clear that the Government will be considering the report urgently and any necessary action taken.

MEV

(MARK ADDISON)

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