BF 29/8/79 Home Affairs

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DS

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 August 1979

The Prime Minister has seen your letter of 14 August about publication of a report by the Expert Group on the revision of Cmnd 884.

The Prime Minister agrees that it would be appropriate to publish this document as proposed.

The Prime Minister has asked about the possibility of converting the waste products under discussion into other fission products with a much shorter half-life. She understands from a recent conversation in Oxford that research along this avenue might prove fruitful. I would be grateful if you could arrange for a note to be submitted to the Prime Minister on the possibilities in this field. It would be helpful if this could reach me by 29 August.

M. A. PATTISON

P.J. Cash, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

ANNEX

THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE REVISION OF CMND 884

1 The Group was set up in March 1976 by an official coordinating committee to carry out the first comprehensive review of radioactive waste management policies and practices since the Radioactive Substances Act came into operation in 1960. It was chaired by DOE and its members were drawn from Government Departments, regulatory bodies, and the nuclear industry. The Group's terms of reference were:

> "To consider Cmnd 884, 'The Control of Radioactive Wastes', in the light of the changes that have taken place since it was written; to review the categories and quantities, present and future, of radioactive wastes; to recommend the principles for the proper management of those wastes; to advise whether any changes in practice or statutory controls are necessary and to make recommendations; to report to the Radioactive Waste Management Co-ordinating Committee."

2 The Radioactive Waste Management Co-ordinating Committee, a working level committee of officials from all the organisations and Government Departments concerned with radioactive waste management, has broadly endorsed the Expert Group's conclusions; so has the independent Advisory Committee.

THE REPORT'S CONCLUSIONS

3 The Group's main conclusions are that the arrangements for meeting the basic objectives for radioactive waste management in the UK, contained in the 1959 White Paper, have worked well in that they have resulted in very low average radiation doses to members of the public. The Group see no need for major changes in policy, but recommend some modifications in emphasis to reflect the latest recommendations on dose limitation made by the independent International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP). (ICRP makes recommendations on radiological protection standards, but their application is left to national authorities: in the UK the National Radiological Protection

Board (NRPB) advises Government on the acceptability and application of international standards.)

4 The Report describes in detail the various categories of waste, and estimates where possible the amounts of waste likely to arise by the end of the century. The Group are generally satisfied with current disposal practices; their main concern is the increasing quantity of wastes in store for which there is no proven method of disposal. The Group is generally satisfied that wastes can be safely stored, but in view of their basic conclusion that storage should only be an interim measure pending disposal, they recommend that research and development into disposal methods for all categories of stored waste should be urgently pursued.

5 The Report considers in detail the options for disposing of all stored wastes. The Expert Group share the Royal Commission's confidence that an acceptable disposal route for high level vitrified waste will be found, and support the White Paper's objective of pressing ahead simultaneously with research into all three disposal options - in land, on and under the sea-bed. The Group in fact see the lack of disposal routes for intermediate level wastes as the main gap in waste management strategy, and urge a comprehensive research programme to evaluate the options for all categories of this waste. They conclude that increasing use should be made of sea disposal, but consider that a new land-based facility may also be needed.

6 The Group feel that until a waste management strategy had been more fully worked out it would be premature to decide upon the type of organisation which would be required to operate any new storage and disposal facilities. (There is a commitment in Cmnd 6820 to consider further the Royal Commission's proposal for a Nuclear Waste Disposal Corporation; this matter will also be the subject of advice by the Advisory Committee.)

7 Although the Group did not consider it their task to make detailed comments about Ministerial responsibilities, the implication of their Report is that present legislation is in general adequate for controlling radioactive wastes.

PRIME MINISTER

This seems somewhat complacent. But there is no case for withholding the report. Agree to publication? MAP 14/8

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MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Is there no possibility of converting the waste products into other fissile products with a much shorter half-life. I understood from my old Oxford days that much research may prove fruitful.

14 August 1979

Dear Mike,

RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT : PUBLICATION OF REPORT BY THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE REVISION OF CMND 884

Otherwise agreed MJ.

My Minister has recently approved the publication of the Report of an Expert Group which has reviewed the 1959 White Paper "The Control of Radioactive Wastes" (Cmnd 884). The Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Energy are also content.

In the White Paper "Nuclear Power and the Environment" (Cmnd 6820) the Government promised to announce publicly the findings of the review of present arrangements and to consult the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee about them. The Committee, which was established in 1978 under the chairmanship of Sir Denys Wilkinson FRS, has now considered the Report in detail and has expressed the firm view that it should be published as soon as practicable. The document will probably be published next month at about the same time as the Review of Radioactive Waste Management Research which the Department has recently carried out. The document would be essentially a free-standing report by a group of experts; the Government, the nuclear industry and the Advisory Committee would not be committed to its findings at this stage. The Advisory Committee's views will be incorporated in their first Annual Report, which is due at the turn of the year, and the Government will consider its response thereafter - possibly in a White Paper.

The Report's general conclusions (which are described in the Annex to this letter) are that present disposal practices are safe, and that wastes which cannot at present be disposed of can be safely stored. The Group sees no need for major changes in policy and they imply that present legislation is generally adequate to control radioactive wastes. The Group urge increasing research into finding ways of disposing of intermediate and high level wastes which are currently stored. Publication of their report would therefore both reassure the public that present waste management practices are safe, and give support to the research programme into the suitability of different rock types for the disposal of high level wastes deep underground, which is currently meeting considerable local opposition. It would also show that the disposal problems which still remain are being investigated seriously and thoroughly.

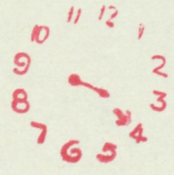
In view of the widespread public interest in all matters radioactive, I should be glad to know that the Prime Minister is content with these arrangements.

Yours sincerely

Peter

P J CASH
Private Secretary

M A Pattison Esq



Home Affairs 24.7.79.

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Dorrell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the geological research programme connected with the disposal of high level radioactive waste.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. I welcome this opportunity to set out our views on present and future research connected with the disposal of high level radioactive waste. I refer particularly to the geological research programme involving the drilling of test boreholes in cerain areas of the United Kingdom. I must make it clear that this is not a programme for disposing of radioactive waste but is purely research into whether disposal in geological formations is feasible.

A principal element in my responsibility for radioactive waste management policy, which I share with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, is to ensure that there is adequate research and development on methods of disposal of wastes arising from the civil nuclear power programmes. Wastes which cannot be disposed of at present are safely stored, but the long-term aim is to identify safe disposal routes.

Research on one of the major options for the treatment of high-level waste for safe disposal—vitrifying the waste in glass blocks—is well advanced in the United Kingdom. A plant to manufacture these blocks should, on current plans, be in operation by about 1990. The blocks would probably need to be stored in water- or air-cooled vaults for some years, but after cooling they would be suitable for disposal. Several methods of disposing of them safely are being researched, but have yet to be demonstrated.

There are three possible methods of disposal: on the bed of the deep ocean,

1979, rejected ; where the hearings will be held ; and what will be the approximate date for the last case to be heard.

Sir George Young: Vaccine damage tribunals have been established at the following centres:

Cardiff, London, Nottingham, Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh.

The tribunal at Cardiff met for the first time on 23 July ; tribunals at the other centres named will be holding their first sessions shortly. The question of setting up tribunals at other places is under consideration.

A total of 666 claimants have so far asked for their cases to be reviewed by the tribunals, and it is hoped that a substantial proportion of these cases will have been dealt with by the end of this year.

Mr. Thornton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) of those applications for payment under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979

3. Analysis of cases under 2(*a*) by vaccine in question.

Vaccines	
Diphtheria, tenanus and whooping cough	117
Diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and poliomyelitis	46
Diphtheria and whooping cough ...	9
Whooping cough	3
Diphtheria	1
Diphtheria, tetanus and poliomyelitis	1
Poliomyelitis	10
Measles	12
Rubella	1
Smallpox	47
	247

Finer Report

Mr. Critchley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if it is his intention to implement the recommendations of the Finer report and when.

Mr. Prentice: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Members for

into stable geological formations on land, or under the ocean bed. No judgment can be made among these methods until more is known about them. The Government are accordingly undertaking a comprehensive research programme into each of these options. The work so far supports the view that a safe disposal route can be identified but at this stage there is no commitment to any one method in preference to the others. The aim is to have a demonstration facility, or facilities, for one or more of the methods in operation during the 1990s with a view to having an actual disposal facility in operation early in the next century.

Disposal of high level radioactive waste is of world-wide interest. Research and exchanges of information are co-ordinated internationally through the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the European Economic Community. The United Kingdom plays a full part in these activities. So far, research has been mainly directed towards determining the feasibility of disposing of high level waste in formations deep below the land surface but there are now signs of increasing international interest in the possibility of ocean disposal, and the United Kingdom is initiating an expanding research programme to assess the sea-bed options.

The United Kingdom research programme into the feasibility of disposing of high level waste into land formations is already well under way. Desk studies carried out by the Natural Environment Research Council at its institute of geological sciences indicate that potentially suitable rocks lie under about 16 per cent. of the land area of the country. Specific areas, listed below, have been identified for research purposes so that information can be collected about a wide range of rocks. The next step is a programme of geological research involving test drillings to examine fully the properties and characteristics of different geological formations in situ.

So far the programme has concentrated on areas containing hard crystalline rock, and it is intended that the next group of planning applications for drilling test boreholes will also include areas of clay or salt or both. Only when full information is available, and has been properly evaluated, will it be possible to judge whether or not disposal deep underground is an option to be pursued; and, if it is, which of the rocks would be most suitable.

I emphasise the importance of test borings for these purposes. The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has so far made four planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Acts to carry out preliminary geological investigations involving the sinking of test boreholes in selected areas. One application, in Caithness, has been granted; one in the Kyle and Carrick district of Strathclyde region, and two in Northumberland, have been refused. The authority has submitted appeals against the refusals in Northumberland and Kyle and Carrick, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has recently announced the setting up of a public local inquiry into the authority's appeal in the Kyle and Carrick district. Appeals will of course be decided on their merits, after the most careful assessment of all the evidence. I would stress that these applications concern operations which are solely for geological investigation. There is no question of carrying out experiments with radioactive wastes in this phase. Nor have the Government any commitment to disposal of waste underground rather than on, or under, the sea-bed. There should be no permanent environmental effect of any kind from the geological research.

These four applications relate to the first few of about fifteen areas which have so far been identified in England, Scotland and Wales as likely to provide useful information about the structures and characteristics of the relevant geological formations. The following list indicates in general terms, and without attempting to establish any priorities, the areas and types of geological formation identified as suitable for further investigation in this first stage. Other areas may be identified in the future for exploratory investigation and added to the list. On the other hand, some of the areas identified may prove unsuitable for further examination. All exploratory work, including test borings, in any area, whether or not on land owned by the Crown or by a Government agency, will be the subject of appropriate planning procedures and publicity will be given to the proposals.

When research has been conducted for about ten years the Government expect to have obtained sufficient information to enable decisions to be taken about the development of demonstration disposal sites underground or on, or under, the ocean bed. These would be fully engineered and in the case of land facilities would involve the construction of access shafts deep into the selected formations. There is no question of each of the fifteen areas chosen for the geological research programme being developed to this stage. At the most, two or three sites would be selected. Vitrified waste would be placed in the demonstration disposal sites so that detailed measurements and tests under operating conditions could be made. For the first time radioactive wastes would be used ; at the end of the tests the wastes could be recovered if required.

Any proposals for demonstration disposal of radioactive waste deep underground would be the subject of separate appropriate planning procedures which would investigate thoroughly the effect of the site on the environment. If, in the event, it were decided to go ahead with the development, its operation would be studied over a further period of perhaps 10 years. At the end of that time, underground disposal methods would be evaluated side by side with alternative disposal methods on or under the ocean bed. Decisions could then be taken whether and how to proceed with a full-scale disposal operation in the next century.

PROVISIONAL LIST OF AREAS IDENTIFIED AS SUITABLE FOR INVESTIGATION

Region or County or Island Area and Geological Rock or Formation

Cheshire—hybrid Clays and Salts.
Cumbria—granite, argillaceous (clay).
Grampian—basic igneous intrusion.
Gwynedd/Powys—argillaceous (clay).
Highland—lewisian gneiss, granite moine granulites, migmatised moine granulites.
Leicestershire / Nottinghamshire—argillaceous (clay).
Northumberland—granite.
Somerset—hybrid clays and salts.
Strathclyde—granite.
Western Isles—lewisian gneiss.
Worcestershire—argillaceous (clay).

Japanese Seaweed

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his plans for maintaining the fight against the growth of Japanese seaweed along the South Coast.

Mr. Monro : It is unlikely that sargussum muticum (Japanese seaweed) will be eradicated from our coasts, and will probably continue to spread. Since regrettably the weed is inevitably to be a part of our marine flora, it must be a part of the appropriate local authority's responsibilities to take such annual measures as are necessary to deal with the problem in their area. The Department nonetheless agreed to co-ordinate and finance study into the biology and spread of the weed and to seek means of biological control. We also agreed to co-ordinate and partly finance the development of the most effective mechanical means of clearance in order to assist local authorities to deal as economically as possible with weed control of a new type.

Although there are few signs that the biological research project will produce any dramatic breakthrough, it is at present expected that its activities will be continued until at least 1982, and will continue thereafter as long as there is any prospect of the project producing valuable results.

The mechanical and hand clearance project is much further advanced. Advice on the best methods of hand clearance is now available. A successful trawl has been developed which can be operated from fairly standard boats, and for difficult areas of growth a special boat and methods of operating have been evolved. Work on a suction and cutting device, for areas where trawling is not fully effective, is well advanced. This project will cease once development has been completed.

Information and expert advice arising from these projects continue to be fully available to local authorities.

Birmingham (Inner City Partnership)

Miss Wright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any decisions have yet been made about the future funding of the inner city partnership programme for Birmingham ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. King : Ministers have now almost completed discussions with partnership authority leaders. We are also reviewing public expenditure programmes. I

Home Affairs

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MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

21 September 1979

Dear Mike, NBPM MS

As you may recall, you wrote to me on 15 August conveying the Prime Minister's agreement to the publication of the report of the Expert Group on the revision of Cmnd 884: "The Control of Radioactive Wastes".

I am writing now to inform you of the publication date for this document, which will be 25 September. An advance copy of the Report is enclosed.

Yours,
Peter

P J CASH
Private Secretary

M A Pattison Esq