



BNFL file

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My ref:

Your ref:

30 December 1983

Sir,

Dr John Twidell claims to find a contradiction in my statement to the House of Commons on December 21 about Sellafield.

There is no such contradiction. The National Radiological Protection Board has conducted an examination of all the possible routes by which people in the area could be exposed to the radioactivity washed up from the sea. They concluded that the radioactivity concerned posed no hazard "to the general population of the area". When I used this phrase I meant, and I believe the House of Commons understood, people living and working in that part of West Cumbria. On the other hand, NRPB are concerned that if someone were to go on the beach and handle contaminated items then they could exceed the annual dose limit for the skin. The time this would take would clearly depend on the level of radioactivity in the particular sample. In one case it would have been as short as 10-15 minutes, and in other cases a few hours. But these particular exposures were easily avoidable and it was sensible to warn the public of the risk.

The published reports by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which are freely available from those bodies, contain the numbers which Dr Twidell appears to be seeking.

Yours sincerely

A. H. Davis

for
Patrick Jenkin

Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence

The Editor, *The Times*

The Times, December 30 1983

Sellafield thoughts

From Dr John Twidell

Sir, Obviously 1984 has arrived. In reporting to Parliament about the radioactive emissions from the Sellafield reprocessing plant, Mr Patrick Jenkin stated in consecutive sentences:

a. "The radioactivity in the samples was well below the level that would constitute any hazard to the general population in the area" and

b. "The main concern is that anyone handling the more active samples from the beach could exceed the annual dose limit for the skin after only comparatively brief direct contact."

The statements are a clear case of 2+2=5. The public is being treated as innumerate (what is "comparatively brief") and irrational ("below the level" yet "exceeds the limit").

Should we now expect notices on the Sellafield beach to read: "This beach is safe for the public when the public does not enter"?

Yours sincerely,

JOHN TWIDELL

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December 23.