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CONFIDENTIAL

P 02047

Prime Minister

From: J B UNWIN

7 May 1986

MR NORGROVE

The further news from Chernobyl makes it much more important for one department to have a co-ordinating policy responsibility.

ARRANGEMENTS TO COPE WITH THE EFFECTS ON

THE UK OF CHERNOBYL

You may like to raise this at Cabinet. DRS 7/15

You may like to have the following update on the situation, following a further meeting of the CCU which I held earlier this afternoon.

Inter-Departmental Coordination

2. The Environment Secretary has agreed that DOE should be the lead Department and that, without prejudice to his colleagues' specific responsibilities, he should undertake the role of leading Government spokesman. DOE are accordingly coordinating the monitoring and dissemination of relevant information, and have set up an operations room for this purpose, at which representatives of other Departments will be present. The terms of reference of this centre are set out in the note attached. You will see that one of its functions is to "eliminate inconsistent information", and I have asked all the other Departments concerned and the NRPB to give their fullest cooperation to DOE.

3. Similar centres are being set up in Scotland and in Wales, and they will liaise with the DOE centre.

4. This is satisfactory so far as it goes, but the Environment Secretary has not been willing to accept overall responsibility for coordinating Government policy (eg taking the lead in securing any new policy decisions that may need to be taken). I think there is a clear case for this responsibility being put on DOE, as the natural lead Department; but for the time being I will hold daily meetings of the CCU at which any new decisions required can be reached on the spot or referred forthwith to Ministers.

Monitoring of Milk, Water Supplies etc

5. There are no serious developments since yesterday. Although we have judged it prudent to maintain the two-day warning on neat rain water supplies, iodine levels in milk and water are falling and caesium levels seem to have reached a plateau. DHSS have received no reports yet from the ports about suspected contaminated food imports.

EC Discussions

6. Discussions are taking place today in COREPER about a possible ban on selected food imports from seven Eastern European countries. Although we have (and are expressing in Brussels) doubts about the technical and scientific justification for the proposals, it seems likely that they will be endorsed later today or tomorrow by qualified majority. I have instructed the FCO to prepare an appropriate "line to take" on the outcome of these discussions in consultation with DOE, DHSS, MAFF and the NRPB. This will take particular account of any seeming inconsistencies with the precautions we have taken, and the advice given, domestically.

Non Food imports

7. There are reports of some concern by dockworkers at the handling of non-food imports (eg timber) from affected countries. The firm NRPB advice is that no health risk is involved. I have asked DOE in consultation with NRPB to include appropriate advice on this in their next daily press release.

Cabinet on 8 May

*Mr Waldegrave will be present at Cabinet to report on this.*

8. I assume that the Prime Minister will want to ask the Environment Secretary (or Mr Waldegrave, in his absence) to report the latest situation to Cabinet tomorrow morning. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should also be able to report on latest developments in the discussions on the import ban in Brussels. The Prime Minister may also wish to consider whether the arrangements for interdepartmental coordination are satisfactory, or whether it would be prudent, as

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recommended above, to ask DOE Ministers to take responsibility for coordinating policy also. Whatever the arrangements, the CCU will be ready to continue meeting or offering help to individual Departments as necessary.

9. I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary (as Chairman of the CCU) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.



J B UNWIN

Cabinet Office

7 May 1986

TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTRE:    OPEN 8am - 3pm: 7 days  
  until public concern is over

Participants:                 DOE  
                                  MAFF  
                                  SO  
                                  WO  
                                  DTp  
                                  DHSS  
                                  NRPB  
                                  PRESS  
                                  INFORMATION

#### Functions

1. To act as a 'clearing house' for Press and public statements from Government Departments, to ensure consistency.
2. To collect reports from Government Departments and other bodies undertaking monitoring, and collate them to eliminate inconsistent information.
3. To provide to Departmental Press and Information Offices and Ministers with updated status reports on issues listed below, as required.
4. To organise dissemination of raw monitoring data on a two-day basis. Copies to OGD, EEC, WHO.
5. To provide an agreed daily press release (at 3pm)
6. To provide a telephone, telex and fax listing for contact points and names for distribution to OGDs only.
7. Publicise hot line numbers in OGDs for public.

#### Status Reports

1. Air levels.
2. Ground deposition.
3. Water levels - rain  
                               drinking water.
4. Milk
5. Other foodstuffs.
6. Imports - food.   (DHSS)
7. 'Imports' - vehicles, people (DTp and NRPB)
8. Monitoring generally.
9. Implications.



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Mr Waldegrave will be  
waiting outside the  
Cabinet Room to report on  
domestic aspects of  
Chemolyl.

DLS  
7/5.