

William  
Cash.



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister ①

You agreed that the Chernobyl  
announcement should be made  
on Thursday.

Content with the draft  
answer at 'A'?

MEET 16/12

  
Michael Alison  
Funding MP.

CCBC

CONFIDENTIAL

P 02410

MEA

From: J B UNWIN  
16 December 1986

Will you clear with the Prime  
Minister and make the  
necessary arrangements  
please?

MR NORSGROVE - No 10 cc Mr Ingham - No 10

THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

JBS  
16/12

att/14

We have discussed the arrangements for an interim statement on the Chernobyl follow up (subsequent to my minute to you of 2 December). As you know, at a meeting held by the Lord President on 10 December it was agreed that the Secretary of State for the Environment should undertake the lead Minister role in the event of any future nuclear accident outside the UK. I have therefore revised the proposed statement to take account of that and of some further points made by the Environment Secretary (largely to shorten the statement and to make it a little snappier). I have also, at the express request of the Secretary of State for Energy, cleared the statement with the Attorney General from the point of view of any possible implications for Sizewell.

2. You told me that the Prime Minister would prefer the statement to issue later this week. I therefore attach a fair copy, together with some background briefing, and I should be grateful if you would arrange for the Question to be put down and the Written Answer given on Thursday, 18 December.

3. I am copying this minute and enclosures to Mr Ingham, with whom Brigadier Budd has already been in touch separately.

  
J B UNWIN

A

CONFIDENTIAL

Question Will the Prime Minister make a statement on the review of contingency plans following the Chernobyl accident.

Answer The first stage of a thorough review of existing emergency plans and procedures in the light of experience of the Chernobyl accident has now been completed by the Cabinet Office in consultation with the appropriate Government Departments and agencies concerned.

2. The existing plans are addressed specifically to an accident occurring within the UK and cover both the emergency procedures at the site and offsite arrangements to protect the public. They continue to provide a valid basis for the response to any nuclear accident in the UK. However the Government have decided that planning needs to provide more specifically for the response to a nuclear accident outside the UK.

3. Detailed planning is now in hand. Among other things this will need to ensure nationwide monitoring coverage and, in the light of expert assessment of the results of monitoring, for the dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the general public. In the event of any future nuclear accident overseas affecting the United Kingdom the Secretary of State for the Environment will take the lead in co-ordinating Government action.

4. At the same time the Government will continue to work with our international partners both in the International Atomic Energy Agency and elsewhere to improve the arrangements for coordinated international action. In the meantime, the two recently signed International Atomic Energy Agency sponsored conventions should ensure earlier and more effective notification and dissemination of information than occurred in the case of the Chernobyl accident.

PTO.

5. I shall make a further statement when the detailed planning now in hand has been completed and appropriate steps will be taken to make the new arrangements known to the public and to all the authorities concerned.

CHERNOBYL - Supplementary Notes for use in reply to questions

1. Lead Department

- (i) As already explained for any future accident overseas the Secretary of State for the Environment will take the lead;
- (ii) For any accident within the UK the Secretary of State for Energy, Defence, Scotland or Transport will take lead responsibility in accordance with existing plans.

2. Publication of the Interim Report?

No (not the practice to publish internal Cabinet Committee working documents of this kind). But, as in the past, the outcome of the review will in due course be publicised in contingency plans which will be made available in the usual way (in public libraries, through local liaison committees etc) as soon as practicable.

3. Why is the planning taking a long time?

- (i) a great deal of complex and detailed planning, particularly at local level, still has to be done;

- (ii) but the first stage of the review has mapped this out and the follow-up work is already under way.

4. What consultation with Local Authorities?

Will be undertaken as appropriate during the further planning. Aware of views expressed by Association of County Councils on 23 September - many of which coincide with priorities already identified ie. need for a nationwide monitoring coverage, expert assessment of the results, dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the General Public.

5. Are changes contemplated for present plans?

Present plans continue to provide a valid basis for responding to any nuclear accident in the UK. But consideration of certain detailed aspects is continuing and any changes that would serve to make the plans more effective will be made. .

6. Area from which evacuation might be required?

[The Russians evacuated an area of some 35 Km around the Chernobyl reactor]. Current UK plans incorporate evacuation up to a distance of 2-3 Km in the circumstances of what is known as a 'reference accident' (ie. the accident defined in present plans as causing the largest off-site release of radioactivity), with other public protection measures (eg. monitoring, control of contaminated food and water supplies etc) up to some 40 Km from the site. But they provide the basis for evacuation on a larger scale, if it should prove necessary.

7. EC cooperation?

Work is continuing within the EC to set up, in the light of the Chernobyl experience, arrangements for coping more effectively with any future radiation hazards. The UK is playing a full part in that work.

8. How long will additional work take?

It will proceed with the maximum speed possible.

9. How often are plans reviewed?

A continuous process in the light of developing technology and techniques. Plans for responding to an accident at one of our nuclear installations were reviewed after the accident at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979. A number of changes were made then and details of the revised plans were set out in 1982 in the booklet published by the Health and Safety Executive entitled "Emergency Plans for Civil Nuclear Installations. In addition regular exercises are held which frequently produce lessons which lead to the review and improvement of plans.



DISASTER Soviet Nuclear Accident

Apr 86

