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LCB

CONFIDENTIAL

W0517

MR NORGROVE

24 April 1987

THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

I attach a letter to the Prime Minister reporting on my enquiry into the response to the need for research into the long term scientific and technical implications of the accident as they affect the UK. This exercise was complementary to that of the Civil Contingencies Unit which examined the Government's reaction in the immediate aftermath of the incident.

2. In general I am satisfied with the underlying research being done but there is a lack of coordination and leadership in this field. The Department of the Environment, although ostensibly in the lead, has been weak. (The Natural Environment Research Council was far more active in the aftermath of the accident.) The interface between the Department of Energy and other Departments is poor, the Agriculture Departments are diligent but the Health Departments less so.

3. I have it in mind to prepare a note, which may be used as the basis of a letter from the Prime Minister to the Secretary of State to the Environment, calling for more effective coordination and improved presentation of the Government's overall research effort. I have consulted Martin Holgate who is supportive and would be happy to discuss before a final draft is prepared.

4. I have copied this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.



JOHN W FAIRCLOUGH  
Chief Scientific Adviser

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W0516

PRIME MINISTER

24 April 1987

THE LONG-TERM SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

The accident at the nuclear power station at Chernobyl released large quantities of radioactivity into the environment, some of which was deposited on the UK. This Note summarizes the Government's reaction to the need to determine the long term scientific and technical implications of the accident as they affect the United Kingdom.

2. Few spending Departments or Agencies reported that resource constraints limited the amount of essential Chernobyl-related research able to be performed although most have reordered their priorities to carry out such work within existing cash limits by re-direction of existing programmes rather than by the initiation of new projects.

Monitoring

3. There is no intention to discuss here the quality, quantity or procedures for co-ordination of the measurements made in the immediate aftermath of the accident. The requirements in this area are primarily of an administrative rather than scientific nature and have been addressed by a Working Group of the Civil Contingencies Unit. Some research on the optimization of monitoring networks, the improvement of the compatibility of monitoring systems, and minor improvements to predictive and analytical techniques may be desirable but these do not need any specific post-Chernobyl initiatives.

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Reactor Safety

4. Reviews have been made both of the characteristics of UK thermal reactors and the procedures adopted by the operators of nuclear installations. It has been concluded that there are no reasons to initiate research specifically to deal with matters arising from the incident. However, the detailed emphasis of some parts of the General Nuclear Safety Research programme of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has been modified to reflect an increased awareness of safety issues and the man-machine interface as it applies to nuclear installations.

Food

5. The general thrust of research carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has remained unchanged. No new requirements were identified, although there have been changes in impetus and emphasis. There has, for example, been a refocussing on the mechanisms of transfer of radioactivity to animals in high fell areas and on the effects of different soil types. The particular difficulties associated with high residual radioactivity in hill sheep in Cumbria and North Wales has however warranted an extra transfusion of research funds into MAFF.

Health

6. There are unlikely to be any large scale health effects in the UK which are directly attributable to Chernobyl radioactivity and no projects have been funded which are specifically devoted to this subject. The Department of Health and Social Security is, however, involved in the European Commission programme which addresses many issues of general concern, including epidemiological studies and the methods of treatment of highly exposed people near a nuclear accident.

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Co-ordination

7. The coordination and review of environmental radioactivity research is currently achieved through a committee chaired by the Department of the Environment. This mechanism requires to be suitably modified to ensure that all relevant Departments are aware of the totality of the Government's research programme in this area and participate in its development. Authoritative reviews of progress including international perspectives could be prepared by this committee for subsequent discussion by the Committee of Chief Scientists, which I will chair. Consideration should be given to improving the presentation of the Government's programme in this area.

Conclusion

8. The scientific community are confident that the research currently in place is adequate to determine the long-term scientific and technical lessons of the Chernobyl incident. Steps must however be taken to improve the inter-Departmental coordination in research into radioactivity in the environment, with the Department of the Environment taking the lead.



JOHN W FAIRCLOUGH  
Chief Scientific Adviser



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*From the Private Secretary*

MR. FAIRCLOUGH

CABINET OFFICE

SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

Thank you for your minute of 24 April about research into the implications of Chernobyl.

I have no comments on your draft minute.

I am copying this minute to Trevor Woolley (Sir Robert Armstrong's Office).

DNS

David Norgrove

1 May 1987

JA

*ccpe*

  
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P 02657

From: J B UNWIN

30 April 1987

*fr*  
MR MORGROVE - No 10

**THE LONG TERM SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT**

*w F H 201?*  
I have now had a look at Mr Fairclough's minute to you of 24 April, which you mentioned to me the other day.

2. I am content with what Mr Fairclough proposes. There is clearly a need for better coordination of the Government's research effort in this field. I am also satisfied that the work does not cut across the wider Chernobyl contingency planning work that we have been doing in the CCU (and as a result of which I recently circulated a new draft National Plan for clearance by Ministers by the end of this week).

3. So far as I am concerned, therefore, I see no reason for you not to advise the Prime Minister to endorse Mr Fairclough's proposal. Whether the proposed note needs to go out on the Prime Minister's authority or whether, for example, it might issue from Sir Robert Armstrong to Permanent Secretaries, is a matter you will want to judge.

  
J B UNWIN

Cabinet Office





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Deputy Secretary, Environment Protection  
and Chief Environment Scientist

Dr M W Holdgate CB

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO  
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NBM

15 April 1987

Dear Robert, attached

**CCU(LC)(87)3: WORKING GROUP ON THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL: THE NEW NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN**

Before he went on leave at the end of last week Terry Heiser discussed with us the papers circulated on 3 April, and he asked me to write to you setting out our views.

We are in general well content with both papers (that is, the new plan and the draft note for the Deputy Chairman of the CCU), and Terry sees no need for Permanent Secretaries to discuss the matter at this stage. However there are one or two points which we should like to register.

First, Mr Ridley has several times expressed the view that there ought ideally to be a single "lead" Minister for all nuclear accidents, whether happening overseas or in this country, and while he accepted that the work now nearing completion should proceed on the basis of separate lead responsibilities, I think he may wish to consider carefully whether this is an acceptable arrangement for the longer term.

Second, we note that from paragraph 26 of the National Plan that a nuclear accident overseas is unlikely to require operational decisions and/or direct action to be taken at local level. I understand that this assessment is based essentially on the technical judgements of the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. Our Ministers may wish to satisfy themselves that this proposition is robust.

Third, we note that no special provision has been made for bearing the costs of implementing the National Plan. The public expenditure implications need to be further clarified. Meanwhile



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we do not accept that either the running costs or the capital expenditure can in our case be found within existing baselines. The costs identified in the paper are far greater for this than for any other Department.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Permanent Secretaries of other Departments represented on the CCU.

*Yours ever,*



M W HOLDGATE