

PRIME MINISTER

CHERNOBYL: THE NEW NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN

*don't like this
para - it sounds far too
complex. I would
prefer to refer to consider
the report before
reaching
a decision
to publish
pub*

You published in December last year the interim results of the Cabinet Office Review of emergency plans in the light of experience of the Chernobyl accident. Departments, the NII, NRPB and others have now completed the stage of the Review which deals with the consequences in the UK of a nuclear accident outside the UK.

Brian Unwin and Departments are keen for you to publish the results this week, and a draft answer is below.

I raised with Brian Unwin the question whether it was sensible to try to publish the results before the Election, when you would not have an opportunity to consider them properly, and also given that the plans may raise more questions than they answer. I was in particular concerned about the first sentence of paragraph 7:

"An accident overseas, even to an installation on the French or Belgian coasts is unlikely to produce effects in this country that would justify making specific contingency arrangements for evacuation, shelter or distribution of potassium iodate tablets."

Brian Unwin in reply, relying on advice from the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, says that the Russians evacuated an area of 30 km. around Chernobyl and issued potassium iodate tablets to evacuees at the time of their evacuation. The nearest point of the UK mainland to a French or Belgian nuclear installation is 40 km.

I am still not convinced that it would be helpful to publish this reply now. For example, the Poles issued potassium iodate tablets to schoolchildren and others. Are we really to seem less cautious than the Poles? Moreover, if the answer is published on Thursday, opponents of nuclear power would have

an opportunity to try to make the Government look silly, and Ministers would not easily have the technical support and advice needed to reply.

My advice is not to publish the reply. During an Election campaign you and other colleagues could say that officials had completed their work, but that the Election campaign intervened before Ministers had had a proper chance to consider it (which would be true). But you will want to look at Brian Unwin's minute and at the draft answer before coming to a decision.

Do you wish to publish the answer this week?



David Norgrove

12 May 1987

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FILE
SRW



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

MR. UNWIN
CABINET OFFICE

CHERNOBYL: THE NEW NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN

Thank you for your minute of 12 May and for the draft Written Answer to announce the second stage of the new national contingency plan for nuclear accidents.

The Prime Minister understands and appreciates all the effort which Departments have put into preparing the new plan so quickly. However, she will not have time this week to consider the proposals in the way they deserve and, in any case, she has doubts, particularly about the first sentence of paragraph 7 (that no specific contingency plans are needed for evacuation, shelter or distribution of potassium iodate tablets), which she believes sounds far too complacent. She would accordingly wish to come back to this after the Election.

It would be helpful then for the Prime Minister to see the analysis which leads to the view set out in the first sentence of paragraph 7. This will need to be capable of carrying conviction with members of the general public as well as with the Prime Minister. As we know from the concern about the disposal of low-level nuclear waste, there are exaggerated fears. Can we say convincingly that the Poles were wrong to distribute potassium iodate tablets to school children and others after Chernobyl? Is there really no prospect that there would be a need for evacuation in the event of a nuclear accident on the French or Belgian coasts? (The Russians after all evacuated an area of 30 km after a disaster to one reactor. Had another of the reactors on the site been damaged, as it might well have been, the area to be evacuated would no doubt have been larger.)

I am sending a copy of this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong, Brigadier Budd (Cabinet Office) and Mr. Ingham.

DW

(DAVID NORGROVE)
13 May 1987

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From: J B UNWIN
12 May 1987

MR NORGROVE - No 10

cc Sir R Armstrong
Brig Budd
Mr Ingham - No 10

CHERNOBYL: THE NEW NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN

Following Chernobyl the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) led an interdepartmental study of the lessons of the accident. Their report (CCU(86)9) was approved by Ministers last December; and the Prime Minister announced the outcome in a Written Answer on 18 December, 1986 (copy attached at Annex).

2. The main conclusions of the first study were that although existing contingency plans continue to provide a workable basis for coping with a Nuclear accident within the United Kingdom, a new national plan should be prepared to cope with an accident outside the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister's statement reported these conclusions and promised another statement when the further work identified had been completed. It also revealed that the Secretary of State for the Environment would take the lead in coordinating Government action in the event of any future overseas nuclear accident affecting the United Kingdom.

3. We have now completed work on a new "umbrella" national plan for coping with an external nuclear accident. Departments under Cabinet Office leadership have worked hard and quickly and have met the very tight timetable I set them (which was about half the time they said they needed). I circulated the report to Ministers on 14 April (CCU(87)6) and, subject to some minor points which present no difficulty, all the Ministers concerned have now cleared it. Although it will need to be complemented by the detailed arrangements in individual departmental emergency books and plans, and by detailed planning provisions at local level, it provides a viable national framework for the Government's response



to any future external nuclear accident.

4. We shall make arrangements in due course to publish the essential parts of the new plan throughout the country for the information of the public and the various authorities concerned. There has, however, been a good deal of pressure on the Government to declare where the work has got to, and accusations of delay.

5. The view of the Departments concerned is that a statement on the work completed should be made as soon as possible - preferably by the Prime Minister by way of a Written Answer. I attach a draft of an arranged Question and Answer which would achieve that and which has been agreed by CCU Ministers.

6. In view of your earlier query to me, we have discussed again with the Department of Energy the statement at the beginning of paragraph 7 about evacuation and potassium iodate tablets. They assure us, on the further advice of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, that in their judgement issue of these tablets is unlikely to be necessary in this country. The Russians evacuated an area of 30 km around Chernobyl and issued potassium iodate tablets to evacuees at the time of their evacuation. The nearest point of the UK mainland to a French or Belgium nuclear installation is 40 km.

7. The calling of the Election obviously affects the timing, and the Prime Minister may wish to postpone considering any statement until after then. On the other hand, there is a risk of continuing criticism of alleged neglect and delay, and there could be advantage in getting the statement out and on the record before Parliament goes down.

8. On balance I think that, since the substance has been agreed after a lot of hard work by and between Departments, there would be advantage in putting the statement on the record now. We will, of course, provide appropriate background briefing to Mr Ingham in support. I should, therefore, be grateful if you would submit this to the Prime Minister.

Question Following her Written Answer of 18 December 1986 will the Prime Minister say what stage has now been reached in preparing a contingency plan to deal with the effects of any future nuclear accident overseas.

Answer The main framework of the new contingency plan, to cater specifically for the consequences for this country of nuclear accidents outside the UK, is complete. Departments and organisations involved in implementing the plan are now preparing their own, complementary, individual contingency plans. Discussion of certain aspects with elected member representatives of the local authority associations will take place in the near future.

The main features of the new plan are:-

Central Government Arrangements

1. These are designed to carry out the following tasks:
 - a. Establish the hazard likely to be faced by this country;
 - b. Determine the measures required to protect and/or reassure the public;
 - c. Issue whatever specific directions or general information may be required;
 - d. Keep Parliament properly informed.

2. These tasks will be carried out under the auspices of the Department of the Environment (the Lead Department) where a Coordination Centre will be established. Officials of departments and organisations directly concerned will work in the Co-ordination Centre where assessments, based on monitoring information, will be co-ordinated, recommendations will be made on action to be taken and briefing material

will be prepared for Parliament, Ministers and the public. Those departments, (including territorial depts), with statutory responsibilities eg. for health, agriculture, control of contaminated cargoes etc, will thus be enabled to discharge them in the context of a co-ordinated response to the effects of an accident.

3. The Secretary of State for the Environment will answer in Parliament on all aspects of Government arrangements except those which are the specific departmental responsibility of other Ministers. Should a need arise the Lead Department would seek support from the appropriate Cabinet committee, under arrangements made by the Cabinet Office.

Monitoring and Data Assessment

4. The whole country is to be covered by a network of monitoring stations based on existing facilities. The necessary equipment is already in place in some of these stations and will be installed in the others. Arrangements will be made to supplement the information obtained from these stations by deploying portable detectors, mobile sampling equipment and possibly aerial monitoring devices, as well as using information available from those hospitals, universities, local authorities and other organisations with monitoring facilities.

5. Data from all monitoring sources will be stored on a Central Data Base Facility (CDF) and be available to departments and organisations responsible for making assessments. Commercial electronic mail (eg. BT Gold) telephone, telex and facsimile systems will be used to transmit monitoring information to the CDF. Assessments and advice based on them will be disseminated on appropriate channels, which will include the media, Viewdata systems (eg. CEEFAX and ORACLE) and departmental channels (eg. MAFF, DHSS, FCO and territorial departments) for specific purposes eg. to permit Ministers to carry out their statutory responsibilities. Assessments and the advice based on them will also be stored on the CDF and interested organisations will be given access to them.

Public Information

6. During the period immediately following the Chernobyl accident extensive use was made by the public of departmental 'hot lines' in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff. These facilities will be continued. In addition, information and advice will be routed to the public via local authorities, health authorities and the regional structure of the relevant central Government departments. Further discussions will be held with local authority associations and others about practical aspects of implementing this part of the plan.

Public Protection

7. An accident overseas, even to an installation on the French or Belgian coasts, is unlikely to produce effects in this country that would justify making specific contingency arrangements for evacuation, shelter or distribution of potassium iodate tablets. Arrangements will be made to cover the following:

- a. Treatment of those returning from badly affected areas overseas for acute effects of exposure to radiation - by Health Departments;
- b. Possible contamination of food and water - by DOE, MAFF, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices;
- c. Advice to UK citizens abroad or intending to travel - by FCO, DTI, D.Transport, MOD, DHSS, (together with ABTA and the media) as appropriate;
- d. The import/export of contaminated goods - by DTI, DHSS, MAFF and territorial departments closely co-ordinated with arrangements being made under EC auspices.

Action will be co-ordinated as necessary under lead department auspices.

Relationship with Plans for an Accident inside the UK

8. Existing plans to cope with a nuclear accident inside the UK, relating to individual nuclear installations, which will remain the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for Energy, Scotland, Defence or Transport as appropriate, have mostly been publicised in some detail in the areas to which they apply and in more general terms in the Health & Safety Executive publication 'Emergency Plans for Civil Nuclear Installations'. Any accident in this country would almost certainly require implementation of parts of this plan eg. activation of the monitoring network. There will therefore be close correlation between this plan and existing plans, which are currently under review.

Review Arrangements

9. The new plan will be kept under regular review. Arrangements will be made for appropriate exercises to practise the plan and, where necessary, improve it.

Thursday 18th December 1986

(Answered by the Prime Minister on Thursday 18th December)

UNSTARRED Mr William Cash: To ask the Prime Minister,
No. 271 if she will make a statement on the review of
 contingency plans following the Chernobyl accident.

THE PRIME MINISTER:

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.

The existing plans are addressed specifically to an accident occurring within the United Kingdom 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 United Kingdom. However, the Government have decided that planning needs to provide more specifically for the response to a nuclear accident outside the United Kingdom.

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 coordinating Government action.

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 co-ordinated 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.

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.