



PRIME MINISTER

SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

Prime Minister (1)

Agree, subject to colleagues?

2/16
21/6

Yes
mt

INCIDENCE OF LEUKAEMIA IN BONNYBRIDGE/DENNY AREA

I should be glad to have your approval to set up a non-statutory independent review of the evidence of the incidence of leukaemia and related disorders in the Bonnybridge/Denny area of Central Scotland, and of any other relevant information. You will be specially interested in this in view of the considerations which were discussed at the meeting after Cabinet on 17 May. [Environmental Pollution]

2. There has recently been considerable publicity in Scotland about the processes being undertaken at a factory in Bonnybridge owned by Re-Chem International which undertakes the processing of certain highly toxic chemicals. I understand that the company also has factories in Southampton and Pontypool each carrying out similar processes. It has been alleged, so far without any evidence to support such claims, that animal health and the environment generally have been adversely affected by the activities at the Bonnybridge factory. The latest claims have been that there are now hazards to human health and Dennis Canavan has put down five Parliamentary Questions for priority written reply seeking information about the incidence of leukaemia and related disorders in the Bonnybridge/Denny area: John MacKay has promised to write him with this information, and to publish his reply.

3. The statistics which have now been produced give cause for some concern. Although the populations in question are small, and the numbers of blood-related cancers which have been identified are consequently also very small, the registration rate for these disorders has increased in recent years. If the statistics are published in response to Parliamentary Questions, I believe that they will receive sensational publicity from some of the Scottish newspapers which have been campaigning against the Re-Chem factory. I do not think therefore that it will be possible to publish these figures without some assurance that their significance will be assessed by an independent body, and it is for this reason that I intend to announce the proposed independent review.

4. I am very conscious of the need to forestall any public pressure for action to be taken against the Re-Chem plant since the evidence so far available does not entitle us to assume that it is causing any of the troubles suspected or alleged in the Bonnybridge area. (HM Industrial Pollution Inspectorate have been pressing Re-Chem to reduce their emissions of ash and dust, but this is a separate issue.) The terms of reference which I propose for the review would not therefore include any mention of the Re-Chem factory, though it will no doubt be assumed in some quarters that the institution of the review amounts to an indictment of the factory. I would make it clear however that I regard this as the only responsible way in which to check whether there is any evidence of hazard to public health.

5. I propose that the review should be conducted under the chairmanship of Professor John Lenihan who recently retired as Professor of Clinical Physics at Glasgow University and that its terms of reference should be:

"To review any unusual features of morbidity recorded in the Bonnybridge/Denny area and in the surrounding district; to report on the significance of any abnormal findings and on any other relevant information that is available; and to advise whether further studies are required."

The membership of the review would be announced after consultation with the chairman, but I have in mind to include relevant medical, veterinary and environmental expertise so that the agricultural and environmental aspects can also be considered. I would ask for a report within 4-6 months, on the understanding that this might indicate the need for further work. I am anxious, if at all possible, to announce the setting up of the inquiry on 26 June when we shall be writing to Dennis Canavan in reply to his five Parliamentary Questions.

6. I am copying this minute to Peter Walker, Nick Edwards, Patrick Jenkin, Norman Fowler, Norman Tebbit, and Michael Jopling for their respective interests and also to Sir Robert Armstrong.

G.Y.

G.Y.

21 June 1984



Joe VC.
C. DIN. MAFF
WO. CO.
DOE
DHSS
DTI

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

22 June 1984

The Prime Minister has considered your Secretary of State's minute of 21 June, in which he proposed to set up a non-statutory independent review of the evidence of the incidence of leukaemia and related disorders in the Bonnybridge/Denny area.

Subject to the views of colleagues, the Prime Minister is content for your Secretary of State to proceed to establish such an inquiry.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to recipients of your Secretary of State's minute.

(David Barclay)

John Graham, Esq.,
Scottish Office.

6



nbpm. Sfs/Scottad has spoken
to Mr Walker & persuaded him
to let the announcement go ahead.

Dms
26/6

PRIME MINISTER

INCIDENCE OF LEUKAEMIA IN BONNYBRIDGE/DENNY AREA

Although the Re-Chem Factory at Bonnybridge is not directly the concern of my Department, I have serious doubts about the proposal that George Younger has put to you for a review of health statistics in the area.

The causes of leukaemia and the reasons for the variations in its local incidence are not fully understood. It seems unlikely that a medical inquiry into selective evidence about a specific local variation will be able to come to any clear conclusion about its cause.

I think it would be most unfortunate if, following the Black Inquiry which is now looking into the incidence of leukaemia around Sellafield, there was to be a proliferation of inquiries focussing on other industrial plants where allegations have been made. The setting up of such an inquiry is bound to do immense damage to the public image of the organisation concerned, which is unlikely to be counter-balanced, for the reasons above, in the final report.

I am also concerned, more specifically, that this inquiry would give rise to renewed pressure for investigation into allegations that Sellafield has given rise to excess cancer rates in the West of Scotland, or into the incidence of leukaemia around other nuclear sites.

I would much prefer to wait and see what Black concludes about the variation in leukaemia incidence that he is investigating, including recommendations that he may have for further research, before committing ourselves to this new inquiry. It may well be that what is needed is a systematic examination of the variations in local leukaemia incidence throughout the UK rather than more selective studies.

I am copying this to the recipients of George Younger's minute.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY

26 June 1984

Env. Affairs : Acid Rain #2.



TO: [Illegible]