RADIOACTIVE WASTE FROM NEW GENERATION OF NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS WILL BE 'INCREASED RISK' TO LONDON

London will face an 'increased risk' from radioactive waste if a new generation of nuclear power plants are commissioned, according to a report commissioned by the Mayor of London.

The report by John Large of Large and Associates, the first which considers the impact of the government's Energy Review, assesses the changes that may arise in the transportation of spent nuclear fuel and other radioactive materials from new and existing power plants. It finds that the possible future movement of waste will impose a level of additional radiation exposure and, in the event of a radioactive release, 'present an additional risk of intolerable levels of health injury' to members of the public who live and/or work alongside the roads or rail track.

The report's other key findings are:

* Of the predicted new-build nuclear power plants, at least two could be built in the south east of England. The existing plants at Bradwell and Dungeness are prime sites to be upgraded – increasing levels of radioactive material from these sites would be transported in and around London
* New generation nuclear power plants are suited to the use of a more highly radioactive fuel than existing plants, which requires special controls for security and containment to prevent a radioactive release with 'potentially severe radiological consequences' – this could start to be transported through London in around 2013-2018
* Even without any new-build nuclear power plants in the south east of England, the decommissioning of existing sites will result in the transportation of 'very large volumes of radioactive waste' starting from 2021 though to 2040
* The exact location of the proposed national nuclear waste repository site is yet to be determined by the Government but will have implications for the amount of nuclear waste transported through the capital

Ken Livingstone, said: 'This report shows that a new generation of nuclear power plants could result in a significant increase of radioactive waste being transported through London, the most densely populated area of the UK. These findings confirm my belief that more nuclear power is unsafe and expensive which will also lead to additional associated risks, not least the disposal of radioactive waste.

'There is a widespread opposition amongst Londoners to nuclear power and the movement of waste around the capital. This report demonstrates that these concerns are justified, underpinning the case against a new generation of nuclear power plants. Nuclear power will not provide the solution to climate change. There is no need for nuclear if we simply wasted less of the current energy we generate.'

Ends

Notes to editors:

* This report is available at: www.london.gov.uk/xxx
* Spent nuclear fuel is currently transported through London from the following power stations: Bradwell in Essex, Dungeness A in Kent and Sizewell A in Suffolk, which are all Magnox powers stations, and from Dungeness B, an Advanced Gas Reactors (AGR) power station and from Sizewell B, a Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR).
* The spent nuclear fuel from these stations is sent to Sellafield in Cumbria for reprocessing by the British Nuclear Group. It is transported by rail by Direct Rail Services (DRS), a company owned by the Nuclear Decommissioned Agency (NDA). This is regulated by the Government based on the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) guidelines.
* Nuclear power plants have been in use in the UK for the generation of electricity since 1957. Three main types of commercial nuclear power plants are in use, Magnox reactors, Advanced Gas Reactors (AGRs) and Pressurised Water Reactors (PWRs).
* Magnox reactors have been in use since 1957, with AGRs in use since 1976, and the sole commercial PWR (Sizewell B) has been operational since 1995. At the peak of operational nuclear power stations, there were 11 Magnox (of which 4 are still operational), and seven AGR stations (of which all are still in commission). The remaining Magnox power stations are currently planned to cease operations by 2008, with the final AGR power station currently planned to cease operations in 2023 and Sizewell B currently planned to stay operational until 2035.

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