



UMHVERFISRÁÐUNEYTIÐ

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The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

Reykjavík, June 2, 2005

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Dear Margaret,

I am writing this letter to you to express my deep concern, and that of my Government, of the findings of the investigation that was established after the unfortunate incident in the Thorp Head End plant at Sellafield.

On April 22nd, British Nuclear Group reported that a pipe had failed in the plant, resulting in a quantity of dissolved nuclear fuel being released into a sealed, contained area. The leakage of the liquid had been identified on April 19th.

I am however glad to hear that the plant is in a safe state and that the event has caused no harm to any individuals nor release of radioactive material to the environment. At the same time, I have to stress that the press release from British Nuclear Group on May 27th, reveals some worrying information.

According to the press release, evidence suggests that the pipe may have started to fail in August 2004 and that the failure, at which point significant amounts of highly radioactive liquid started to leak, is believed to have occurred in mid January 2005. It is therefore causing me great concern that in the period between mid January and April 19th safety measures at the plant seem to have failed to indicate the leaking of 83 m³ of liquid from the fractured pipe. Furthermore, in the same press release, Barry Snelson the Managing Director at Sellafield, said: "I am disappointed that plant indicators were not acted upon as quickly as they should have been...". This information suggests that safety measures at the plant appear to have been far from adequate.

The incident at Sellafield is in my opinion very serious and raises questions on the operational safety of the plant. Any release of radioactive material from Sellafield to the environment would have unthinkable consequences for the people of the North.

I would therefore like to request a full report from your Government on the incident that took place in the Thorp Head End plant at Sellafield, how and why the failure occurred and the planned responses to it.

At the same time I wish to reiterate Iceland's previous requests to the UK Government to ensure that discharges of radioactive material from the nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield is as close to zero as possible or if that cannot be attained to seriously consider closure of the plant.

Sigríður A. Þórðardóttir

Sigríður Anna Þórðardóttir
Minister for the Environment