



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA/Stop Hinkley media release

1 June 2012

Independent review highlights 30 safety issues delaying regulatory approval for EDF's French nuclear reactor design

An independent review of progress in approving the safety of the new design of French nuclear reactors proposed for the UK concludes that it is well behind schedule, with 30 major issues still to be resolved.

The interim assessment of the Office for Nuclear Regulation's (ONR) process for approving EDF-Areva's European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) design was undertaken by engineering consultants Large & Associates. Their concerns are highlighted today by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) and the Stop Hinkley group. French energy company EDF wants to construct two EPRs at Hinkley Point in Somerset - the first new nuclear reactors in the UK for almost three decades (1).

Nuclear engineering consultant John Large is an expert on nuclear safety and is recognised as the UK's foremost independent analyst. He was commissioned to develop a detailed study of the ONR and Environment Agency's Generic Design Assessment (GDA) (2) of two proposed nuclear reactor designs – Areva's EPR and Westinghouse's AP1000 (3). Following the decision by German power companies RWE and E.ON to pull out of developing new reactors at Wylfa and Oldbury, the AP-1000 design assessment is now on hold, leaving the EPR as the only contender.

Key conclusions from John Large's assessment of the EPR design approval process include:

- The GDA process is significantly behind schedule, is currently not expected to be completed until at least Spring 2013, and will therefore not be ready until after the date EDF is hoping to get planning consent to construct Hinkley Point C from the National Infrastructure Directorate.
- Only 1 out of 31 key GDA issues have been resolved, and that one simply involved a desk-top exercise.
- The EPR is an entirely new design, different to anything built before in the UK, and needs to be assessed carefully and properly.
- Queries raised in the ONR report as a result of Fukushima-related stress tests (4), as well as a whole range of other post-Fukushima issues, have yet to be addressed.
- The ONR is critical of the Areva-EDF responses so far, commenting that some "have been late or do not provide the quality of information or depth of evidence that we expected".

A more detailed final assessment of the GDA will be completed by Large & Associates before the end of 2012.

Given this interim assessment, the NFLA and Stop Hinkley believe that **no** final approval of the GDA should be issued by the ONR until all 31 outstanding issues have been totally resolved to the complete satisfaction of the ONR and the Environment Agency and until the manner and robustness of their resolution has been submitted for comment and scrutiny by independent experts. Furthermore, absolutely **no construction** of any part of the site at Hinkley Point should take place until ONR/Environment Agency final approval is given.

The NFLA also believe it is imperative that the ONR and the Environment Agency should not bow to any pressure put on it from the UK government or the nuclear industry to speed up the GDA process in order to advance the new nuclear build programme. It is absolutely essential that nuclear safety is not compromised in any way, particularly given the wide range of critical safety issues that arise from

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the Fukushima disaster. NFLA expresses confidence in the ONR's ability and commitment to ensure that the programme of safety assessment is undertaken at the highest level of professionalism and in a manner which supports their often-stated commitment to openness and transparency, resisting government pressure to comply with politically driven deadlines.

John Large of Large & Associates Consulting Engineers said: "Our national nuclear safety regulator is being squeezed from both sides: on the government's part it is pushing for contracts to be awarded and construction to start on the Hinkley Point reactors in January 2013 and, from the other side, the power station operator EDF just doesn't seem to have allocated the technical resources to address the key nuclear safety issues identified in the GDA process. If the safety regulator gives in to these pressures then it could compromise nuclear safety by nodding through an incomplete design."

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said: "I am greatly reassured that Large & Associates has been commissioned to research the ONR and Environment Agency's generic design assessment of the EPR and AP-1000. The anti-nuclear movement needs such detailed reports to challenge the nuclear regulators and the industry to ensure that no reactor can be built until and unless it can be classed as safe. The fact that only 1 of 31 key issues have been addressed, along with increasing evidence that the economic case for nuclear new build does not stack up, confirms to me that a new nuclear programme should be abandoned."

Stop Hinkley spokesperson Crispin Aubrey added: "These delays in the design approval process provide further evidence that EDF's plans for nuclear power in the UK are seriously stumbling. It is absolutely imperative that no work is allowed to start on constructing Hinkley C until the reactor design has been fully tested and approved."

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Further information:

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Notes to editors:

- (1) Large and Associates, 1st Interim review of Generic Design Assessment – Outstanding Issues, 30th May 2012,
<http://www.largeassociates.com/cz3206/3206%20GDA%20Review/R3206-I1.pdf>
- (2) ONR / Environment Agency Generic Design Assessment of Proposed New Nuclear Reactors
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/newreactors>
- (3) The report was commissioned by Wilkinson Environmental Consultants using a grant from the Alan Wainwright Trust and donations from members of the group Bradwell for Renewable Energy.
- (4) ONR UK nuclear reactor stress test report, January 2012,
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nuclear/news/2012/jan-stress-test-report.htm>

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