



**For Immediate Release
1st December 2021**

Chinese reactor problems likely to cause further delays and cost overruns at Hinkley Point C

The Times (1) has reported that key safety components at Hinkley Point C (HPC) may need to be redesigned and the project delayed after defects were detected at a similar reactor in China. The newspaper says the scheduled start date for HPC electricity generation, June 2026, may have to be postponed.

An investigation is still under way into the cause of the problems at the Chinese plant in Taishan. It was shut down in August after reports of damage to fuel rods. The plant is operated by China General Nuclear Power Group and owned in partnership with the French state-controlled EDF, the two companies involved in building HPC.

The Commission for Independent Research and Information on Radioactivity (CRIIRAD), a French association created in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, said that a whistleblower had reported to them that a design flaw in the reactor pressure vessel could be the cause of the problem at Taishan which means that design changes may be needed.

In a letter to the French nuclear regulator (2), ASN, CRIIRAD says:

“In June 2021, the national and international press widely covered the case of the problems of ruptured nuclear fuel cladding at the Taishan 1 EPR reactor in China.”

It goes on to say there are several possible causes of the rupture some of which may involve design flaws in the reactor. A whistleblower has now told CRIIRAD that the ruptures are caused by a design flaw in the reactors pressure vessel. This will also cause problems in other EPR reactors like Hinkley Point C.

The letter continues:

“If they are true, these revelations raise serious questions in terms of nuclear safety and radiation protection, both for plant workers and for residents. The existence of a generic design defect on the EPR reactor vessel could jeopardize the start-up of [other EPR reactors].”

Stop Hinkley spokesperson, Roy Pumfrey says:

“What’s been cobbled together to get the reactor at Taishan started clearly isn’t working. It’s just another example of the folly of hugely complex designs for big new nuclear reactors. Trying to identify and correct the design flaw can only lead to further delays and cost overruns for the already absurdly expensive HPC project.”

“Stop Hinkley will be pressing the UK’s Office for Nuclear Regulation for a full disclosure of its investigations into this matter. And if expensive delays and modifications to HPC are required, given the already huge cost to consumers, we will be asking government officials to investigate whether, in fact, it would be cheaper to cancel the whole thing.”

Stop Hinkley Contact:

Roy Pumfrey
roy@stophinkley.org
Tel: 07886 028 910
01278 652 089

Notes

- (1) Times 1st Dec 2021 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ef84adce-5215-11ec-8d72-b8ab431649b1>
- (2) See CRIIRAD letter to ASN 27th Nov 2021
http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossier2021/211125_Courrier_CRIIRAD_ASN_suret _EPR_VF.pdf