

Rt. Hon Patricia Hewitt MP
Secretary of State
Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street
LONDON
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By Fax and Post

Torness and Heysham 2 nuclear power stations

On 12th of August Reactor 1 at the Torness nuclear power station was taken out of service due to vibration problems with one its eight gas circulators. Gas circulators are used to pump carbon dioxide gas at high pressure through the reactor core to transfer heat from the nuclear fission reaction to the power station's boilers.

Since mid-May, Torness Reactor 2 has also been shut down due to vibration problems in one of its gas circulators. Greenpeace has been informed that inspection of this gas circulator revealed that the problem was caused by an impeller blade that had broken away from its hub.

During normal operation, the impeller blades rotate at a speed of 3,000 revolutions per minute. Although fortunately it does not appear to have occurred in the recent cases, it is conceivable that a blade becoming detached could lead to more serious consequences such as:

- overheating of the reactor fuel due to blockage of gas flow
- a fire risk following disintegration of the circulator and release of lubricating oil into the reactor
- a major breach of the reactor primary circuit.

Heysham 2 nuclear power station is of the same design and age as Torness. It is clear from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate's (NII) periodic safety review of both Heysham 2 and Torness (published in February 2001) that both stations have historically suffered from unidentified problems affecting gas circulators. Four gas circulators at Heysham 2 were replaced in 1994, one in 1997 and another in July 2002. In light of the recent and historic problems experienced by both Heysham and Torness Greenpeace has written to the NII with a series of questions (enclosed).

It is of the utmost concern to us that, unlike the Torness reactors, Heysham 2 is still operating. We consider it prudent for Heysham 2 to be immediately shut down. We are extremely surprised that the NII has not taken this initiative and suspect that the widely reported financial predicament of British Energy has influenced the NII's decision not to act. We therefore appeal to you to intervene.

In view of the public interest in this matter, we have informed the Media that we have written to you and will make copies of this letter available on request.

We look forward to your immediate response on this issue.

Stephen Tindale
Executive Director
Greenpeace UK