



SIZEWELL B – TERRORISM AND RISKS

“The tragic terrorist attacks on the United States were a wake up call to us all. We cannot be complacent. We have to and will increase our efforts on all fronts – from combating illicit trafficking to ensuring the protection of nuclear materials – from nuclear installation design to withstand attacks to improving how we respond to nuclear emergencies.”

General Mohamed Elbaradei, September 21, 2001, Director General
International Atomic Energy Authority

February 2003

Background

On 13th January 2003, Greenpeace volunteers gained access to the Sizewell nuclear power plant complex – for the second time in six months. Their aim was to expose the failings of nuclear security around the site (and spent nuclear fuel stores) and to highlight the risk of terrorist attack.

The spectre of a major attack on a nuclear installation had been raised on September 11th 2001, when it was believed that the fourth plane (that crashed) was to have targeted the Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

The Greenpeace volunteers succeeded in challenging Sizewell’s security. Several managed to climb the dome of the reactor, whilst others gained access to the reactor building through an unsecured door after scaling a ladder (unchecked by security guards).

Today (Friday 13th 2004), eleven of the volunteers will be at Lowestoft Magistrates Court to face sentencing over charges resulting from the January 2003 incursion. The activists have pleaded guilty to charges of criminal damage (such as painting ‘danger’ on the reactor dome). However, in mitigation they will plead that they performed a public service in exposing the inadequate security around Sizewell B, Britain’s largest nuclear power plant.

Why the volunteers took action.

The action was taken against the background of the Government’s Energy Review, which threatened to propose building more nuclear power plants. The volunteers knew that nuclear security was an issue of high public importance and a significant section of the public were concerned about expanding nuclear power. A MORI poll published in 2002 showed that 72% of British people did not want nuclear power and said they preferred renewable energy sources.

The subsequent Energy White Paper deferred the building of any more nuclear power plants – citing concerns over the risk of terrorism as one of the reasons – thus indicating the breadth of concern over nuclear power and security at nuclear facilities. The volunteers believe their actions contributed to the Government’s decision.

The volunteers were concerned that in October 2002, Greenpeace had entered the Sizewell plant with relative ease and believed that not enough had been done to strengthen security following the initial action. These concerns turned out to be valid, despite reassurances after October that steps would be taken, and it was easy to get in again.

The volunteers were concerned about the security of the reactor building but also about the spent nuclear fuel store. Nuclear power plants such as Sizewell B create hundreds of tonnes of spent nuclear fuel every year. Spent fuel is the most intensely hot and radioactive material on the planet. It is estimated that 230 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel is currently stored at Sizewell, with 30 tonnes more added every year.

The volunteers took the view that the weaknesses in security may in fact amount to criminal offences by British Energy – a breach of site licence amounting to breach of relevant nuclear regulation statutes (e.g. Nuclear Installations (Licencing and Security) Act 1959).

The official response

- The Government's Energy White Paper, published two months after the Greenpeace action, acknowledged that security of nuclear installations was a factor in deferring construction on any new nuclear plants.
- In responding to a Parliamentary Question about the Greenpeace action (one of several tabled) the then Minister for Energy, Brian Wilson noted that "The Director of Civil Nuclear Security is reviewing security at Sizewell B following the incident on 13 January. The Director and the Government take security very seriously and are concerned that any lessons to be learned should be applied to all civil nuclear power stations." (20 January 2003).
- The 2003 report from the Office of Civil Nuclear Security noted that during the second action, Greenpeace volunteers should not have been able to access part of the plant through an unsecured door. The report also noted that 'this rare but regrettable occurrence illustrates why it was necessary to increase the number of OCNS inspectors mentioned at paragraph 39.'
- In November 2003 a report from the international insurance company Swiss Re, entitled '*Nuclear risks in property insurance and limitations of insurability*', reiterated the risks to property from contamination resulting from terrorist acts against nuclear plants and called for changes to limit the liability of insurance companies to such exposure.
- On 7th September 2003 the Express on Sunday carried a report saying that trains carrying spent nuclear fuel were listed in Freightmaster, a magazine available in newsagents.

Threats to nuclear power plants are not new.

On August 29 1985, the International Herald Tribune reported on a US Department of Energy study which stated there had been 14 bombings of US nuclear installations in the preceding decade and 300 threats (thankfully no serious damage or injury resulted).

In 1983, at the trial of IRA terrorist, Gerard Tuit (one of the terrorists who killed Lord Louis Mountbatten) it was revealed that the IRA cell had on its list of targets a spent nuclear fuel shipment between the port of Barrow in Furness and Sellafield.

These are just two of many instances of reports of past terrorist activities and terrorist interest in nuclear installations and transports.

For more information call Greenpeace press office on 0207 865 8255.