

## The data falsification scandal in BNFL's own words

### The changing story

"Some irregularities in data have been detected during the quality control checks on Mox fuel currently being manufactured. All of the BNFL MOX fuel assemblies on the way to Japan have been fully certified by both BNFL and our Japanese customer, and we are confident they meet the specification."

BNFL to Independent, 10 September 1999

"A detailed investigation into the fuel on the way to Japan has shown that it includes no fuel with falsified data and we can categorically confirm that it fully meets the specification and will perform safely and as required in the reactor."

BNFL to Independent, 21 September 1999

"Last night some results of the investigation were made available to BNFL which threw doubts on some more data...Our view is that we must ask Kansai not to load fuel assemblies containing lot P814 and that they should apply for authorisation from MITI to load only 4 assemblies, number 1,2,3 and 4 in the batch of eight sent to Japan for Takahama 4."

BNFL undated memo, released by MITI in Japan, 15 December 1999

"BNFL wishes to apologise to both Kansai and the Japanese regulators for all of the inconvenience caused by this unfortunate incident"

BNFL, 17 December 1999

"There is no evidence that these [batches of fuel] are falsified, just that they're unusual and out of line with the normal results we expect from our QA checks. There are two, possibly three areas where there are some irregularities."

Jeremy Ryecroft, BNFL, Whitehaven News 23 December 1999

"Regrettably, subsequent more sophisticated investigations revealed that other lots were implicated and that data on fuel in Japan had been falsified."

BNFL, Independent 29 January

### The safety issue

"If the pellets are larger than they should be, they can expand and damage the cladding of the fuel rod. If they are too small they can vibrate and the pellets can rupture."

A BNFL source reported in the Independent 14 September 1999

"This is not a safety issue but a quality assurance issue."

BNFL Press Release, 11 January 2000

## Quality assurance

"The MOX pellets were produced against a BNFL MOX pellet specification developed in conjunction with NOK [Swiss nuclear company], Westinghouse and NOK's experienced consultant. The details of this specification are confidential but the following comments are made about pellet quality. (i) No difficulties have been experienced controlling the pellet dimensions, the density, surface finish or thermal stability of the fuels made in MDF...."

Edwards et al, MOX Fuel at BNFL, BNFL Thorp paper, 23 April 1996

"Unfortunately last week some falsification of secondary manual re-check data was detected relating to some lots of fuel pellets currently held in MDF (the MOX Demonstration Facility). This was detected by BNFL's own quality control team. In spite of the falsification, BNFL is confident that the pellets fully meet the specification due to extensive supporting quality data."

BNFL Press Release, 14 September 1999

"It is a disappointing event and we do regret that it has occurred. I think the positive side of it is that our quality control system did detect the problem at the site before we had certified and shipped this particular product."

Simon Marshall, BNFL, BBC Radio 4 "The World Tonight", 14 September 1999

"That's the price we have to pay for, in a sense, having let down our customers on quality assurance..."

Jeremy Ryecroft, Whitehaven News, 23 December, 1999

BNFL has agreed to close the MOX Demonstration Plant until Lloyd's is satisfied that the steps it has taken [on QA] have worked. A spokesman for BNFL said: "This will give us time to get a programme of action underway and to allow periods of retraining for some or all of the workers. The counter-measures involve modification to plant and a revision of the appropriate procedures."

Cumbrian News & Star, 24 January 2000

## Past occurrences

"We have no evidence that any of this has occurred in the past but, as part of our investigation, we will be reviewing our previous documentation to identify if there have been any previous occurrences. Our quality control systems to date have not identified any."

Simon Marshall, BNFL, BBC Radio 4 "The World Tonight", 14 September 1999

"I understand from BNFL that, since the falsification of quality control data relating to Japanese fuel was discovered, BNFL have investigated all quality data for MOX fuel supplied to Switzerland. A data anomaly affecting one lot of fuel pellets supplied in February 1997 was identified but a further investigation by BNFL and its customers concluded that the fuel met the required specification."

Minister Helen Liddell answering a Parliamentary Question [holding answer  
1 February 2000]

### **The business impact**

"There will be delays with our MOX contracts but we are still very confident that once we have sorted out the trust issues those orders will be forthcoming."

Jeremy Ryecroft, BNFL, Financial Times, 18 December 1999

"Of course it's bad news, yes, er, we, we obviously want to put the matter right with, er, with Kansai Electric. We have already accepted that, er, we, er, have to do remedial action with them. But, yes, bringing the fuel back would emphasise, er, the gravity of the situation. This will run into millions of pounds."

Jeremy Ryecroft, BNFL, on World at One, BBC Radio 4, Thursday 13  
January 2000

"SMP is a key part of the jigsaw. It provides the recycling route from Thorp and without it you have no use for the plutonium other than continued stockpiling on the site. BNFL's customers say they want the plutonium back as MOX fuel, so it is a crucial part of the future of Sellafield. Without it you can paint a pretty gloomy picture. This incident over falsified fuel has been a real body-blow to the company, largely an own goal."

A "nuclear industry insider" quoted in the Whitehaven News, 20th January  
2000

"We just hope the company does not overreact as we are talking about the men's jobs. The national press are saying there were safety implications because of the misdemeanours, but there were not."

John Kane, GMB union convenor at Sellafield, Cumbrian News & Star, 24  
September 1999

"What was a minor hiccup has jeopardised the whole business. I think it is the most serious situation that has faced BNFL."

John Kane, GMB union convenor at Sellafield, Planet on Sunday, 23  
January 2000