

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

EP

Report on Nuclear Plant Safety

The debate on nuclear energy has taken on a new dimension since the events in New York on 11 September, which have raised fears about a terrorist attack on nuclear facilities.

A report on the subject commissioned by the European Parliament's STOA (Scientific and Technological Options Assessment) Committee was recently made public. The "shock" report affirmed that "the reprocessing of nuclear fuel at Sellafield (UK) and La Hague (France) constitutes the greatest radioactive waste released into the environment in the world which corresponds to a nuclear accident on a grand scale each year" and suggested that an accident could cause horrendous damage.

French nuclear reactors (58 reactors at 21 sites) would be unlikely to resist the impact of a large commercial airline, as this risk was "statistically too low to be included in the design", according to an expert from the French nuclear safety agency, the IPSA. However, the biggest danger appears to be at the irradiated fuel reprocessing sites in La Hague and Sellafield.



(MURSCHEZ)

Courtesy: Dritte Welt Presse

The report¹ accuses the Commission of "not exercising its inspection rights" and deplores the Commission's

strong dependence on information supplied by Member States. It would, therefore, "apparently not be in a position to guarantee the respect of basic safety standards on the Sellafield and La Hague sites". The report concludes that it is doubtful whether the Commission is in a position to determine if the reprocessing activities are likely to cause radioactive contamination of the water, soil or air of another Member State.

The supporters of nuclear fuel have rushed to challenge the report, which they say is not based on any scientific grounds. However, the report was welcomed by independent scientific experts hired by STOA.

The principal aim of the STOA report is to assist the Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament in its consideration of Petition 393/95 brought by Dr. W. Nachtwey (Ireland) six years ago.

The Petition expresses concerns about radioactive discharge from nuclear reprocessing plants at Sellafield and La Hague, and their possible adverse health effects. The Committee of Petitions therefore approached STOA and asked them to carry out a scientific study. STOA asked the report to concentrate on the effects of nuclear reprocessing waste on health, safety and the environment. It therefore presents the "proofs and facts" on

1. radioactive discharges from the Sellafield and La Hague sites;
2. the resulting concentration of nuclear material that ends up in the environment, especially in food;
3. radiation doses from nuclear discharges to critical groups near the sites;
4. adverse health effects near the two sites;
5. collective doses resulting from nuclear discharges.

The report also states that the "rise in radioactive waste from La Hague during the 1990s and the forecasts for future waste would be in violation of the obligations imposed by the OSPAR Convention" for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, of which the Commission is a signatory. (MJ)

Note:

¹ The report's conclusions will be available on STOA's website in eight languages.

