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Prime Minister 2

From: J B UNWIN
6 May 1986

MR NORSGROVE

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ARRANGEMENTS TO COPE WITH THE EFFECTS ON
THE UK OF CHERNOBYL

You may like to have the following report for the Prime Minister's return of the latest situation on Chernobyl and the Government's response so far.

Monitoring of Milk, Water Supplies, Air etc

2. Monitoring and sampling was intensified as soon as increased levels of radio activity in the UK were suspected. The position, in brief, is as follows:-

(i) Milk and Vegetables: levels of iodine in milk seem to have peaked 2 days ago, and levels of caesium are expected to peak in the next day or so. The action level of iodine in milk (the agreed European standard, although some member states set a lower level) is 2000 bequerels per litre; the highest level recorded so far in England and Wales is 371 bequerels, and in Scotland 370 bequerels;

(ii) Water Supplies: following heavy rain in the North West of England and Scotland on Friday and Saturday, ground levels of radio activity increased but the levels of iodine are now falling, and the levels of caesium are expected to peak in the next day or so. However, since the levels of radio activity in rain water in Glasgow and Lancashire over the weekend came close to the action limit recommended for two days continuous consumption, the DOE and the NRPB have advised the public not to consume neat rain water for periods longer than two days. Very few people (eg some isolated farms and campers) are likely to be affected. Intensified sampling has revealed no significant radio activity in wells, springs or piped water supplies;

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(iii) Air contamination: The peak period for accumulations was 2/3 May. Tests revealed no health risk, and the level of contamination identified has continued to fall;

(iv) Food Imports: all relevant port authorities have been asked to hold any consignments containing fresh food from affected countries that might be contaminated. No such consignments have yet been received, but if any case arises, arrangements will be made with MAFF laboratories for immediate testing (note: the question of food imports is one of Community competence, and discussions are taking place in Brussels today with a view to a selective ban on imports. I have, however, asked DHSS and MAFF to maintain the action described above pending developments in Brussels);

(v) Transport and Travel: I have asked the Department of Transport to examine urgently with the NRPB the question of lorries and other vehicles entering the UK from contaminated areas. I await a report on this. I have also asked the FCO to review the guidance given to UK visitors to affected countries;

(vi) Home Office and Police: appropriate arrangements have been made for the police to inform enquirers about the assistance available under the National Arrangements for Incidents Involving Radio Activity (NAIR) scheme.

Interdepartmental Co ordination

3. The Departments primarily concerned have been DOE, MAFF and DHSS. Action up to and during the weekend was co-ordinated between them with the help of the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) Secretariat. I called a meeting of the CCU at official level this morning to review developments. In addition to the specific action points noted above, I have asked all the Departments concerned to maintain intensified sampling and monitoring until a positive decision can prudently be taken that this is no longer necessary. I have also asked the Department of the Environment to take over now the general role of lead Department in close consultation with the other Departments

Mr Baker is objecting to this.

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concerned. This does not mean that they will assume other Departments' responsibilities; but experience shows that it makes for better order and good sense to have a single Department as the focal point for further action (clearing statements, handling and directing inquiries, pulling together any further planning etc). I will, however, stand ready to convene the CCU again and to offer further Cabinet Office help should it be necessary.



J B UNWIN

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