

c: Lord President

PRIME MINISTER

POST CHERNOBYL PRESENTATION

No doubt the Cabinet will receive a report on the post-Chernobyl situation tomorrow.

This is to record that the media are making something of an alleged lack of coordination in Government and a weaker performance by the UK Government than other European Governments.

I have tried to explain today that Mr Baker is in charge of coordinating monitoring and the environmental aspects of the problem and overall presentation, but that individual Ministries - eg MAFF, Energy, DHSS - have their own responsibilities.

All this may sound sensible, but what I think the media have sensed is a reluctance on the part of Ministers:

- i. firmly to confront the issue;
- ii. to speak up for nuclear power and to reassure the public by setting detected radiation levels clearly alongside safe levels; and
- iii. to speak confidently about the whole issue rather than just their individual bits of it, which creates an impression of buck-passing.

All this may be unfair. Neither you nor I are in a position to know the strength of the complaint first hand.

Moreover, if interest is diminishing in news terms, there is little to be said for perpetuating it.

But you may feel that what we need at the very least is a single speaking note and to wrap up the issue when the experts are confident atmospheric contamination is well past its worst and the increased, but still entirely safe levels of radiation are on the wane.

The Sunday press will try to keep this issue going and we need by Friday morning to be deploying a clear and reassuring story on:

- level of increased radiation in relation to safe limits, explaining the basis of our safety limits;
- risk of any return to higher levels;
- when the "all clear" can be sounded in areas where people have been warned not to drink rainwater;
- long term risk of cancer, especially in view of the media treatment of what no doubt were intended to be reassuring remarks by John Dunster, NRPB; (almost any remarks about the risk of cancer will be hyped up by the media);
- treatment of imported foods; (here news of bans on non-food products - eg timber - as are being considered can cause unnecessary alarm).



BERNARD INGHAM

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