

CONFIDENTIAL

P 02387

NB P 7 at this stage

From: J B UNWIN
2 December 1986

MR NORGROVE - NO 10

cc Mr Ingham
Brig Budd

THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

Thank you for your minute of 24 November. Subject to the difficulty explained below, I have now secured the agreement of the Home Secretary and the other CCU Ministers involved to the first report on the Lessons of Chernobyl (CC(86)9).

2. I have also cleared with the Ministers most directly concerned (the Home Secretary, Energy Secretary, Minister of Agriculture and Scottish Secretary) the attached arranged Written Answer for the Prime Minister on the stage reached so far.
3. Despite clearance with DOE officials (who have been closely involved in all the discussions and had not signalled earlier that there might be problems) I have not, however, been able to clear the draft answer with the Environment Secretary. As I understand it, he is opposed to any statement until the question of lead department responsibility for an accident outside the UK has been settled.
4. My own view is that DOE might well be the appropriate lead Department; but until the detailed further planning has been carried out, this cannot sensibly be settled. It might, for example, still prove more sensible to nominate the Department of Energy, who are one of the lead Departments for an internal accident, or the Home Office (in view of their civil protection responsibilities) to take on this task.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

5. As a temporary measure I have suggested that the Cabinet Office should take the lead if any further external accident were to occur. Other Departments accept this. In practice what it means is that in such a situation I should convene the CCU immediately (at Ministerial level if necessary) and operational responsibilities would be assigned forthwith as the situation warranted.

6. I believe it is most important to get this statement out so that the very complex further planning can proceed without delay. We are all set to go (informal work is already under way) but it would put the cart before the horse and delay progress if we had to pause to settle the formal lead department issue now.

7. I should be very grateful, therefore, if you were able to clear the attached statement, on the precise timing of which we should want to confer with Mr Ingham.



J B UNWIN

Cabinet Office

CONFIDENTIAL

Question Will the Prime Minister make a statement on the review of contingency plans following the Chernobyl accident.

Answer The first stage of a thorough review of emergency plans and procedures in the light of our experience of the Chernobyl accident has now been completed by the Cabinet Office in consultation with the appropriate Government Departments and agencies concerned.

2. The plans for responding to an accident at one of our nuclear installations were reviewed after the accident at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979. A number of changes were made and details of the revised plans, including the allocation of responsibilities, were set out in 1982 in the booklet published by the Health and Safety Executive entitled "Emergency Plans for Civil Nuclear Installations". Details of the emergency plans have also been published and made available to local liaison committees and local authorities and to the general public in libraries in the vicinity of nuclear power stations.

3. These plans are addressed specifically to an accident occurring within the UK and cover both the emergency procedures at the site and offsite arrangements to protect the public. They continue to provide a valid basis for the response to any nuclear accident in the UK. However the Government have decided that planning needs to provide more specifically for the response to a nuclear accident outside the UK.

4. Detailed work on the new arrangements is now in hand. Among other things this will need to ensure nationwide monitoring coverage and, in the light of expert assessment of the results of monitoring, for the dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the general public.

5. At the same time the Government will continue to work with our international partners both in the International Atomic Energy Agency and elsewhere to improve the arrangements for coordinated international action. In the meantime, the two recently signed International Atomic Energy Agency sponsored conventions should ensure earlier and more effective notification and dissemination of information than occurred in the case of the Chernobyl accident.

6. I shall make a further statement when the detailed planning now in hand has been completed and appropriate steps will be taken to make the new arrangements known to the public and to all the authorities concerned.

CHERNOBYL - Supplementary Notes for use in reply to questions

1. Lead Department?

(i) continuing work is proceeding under Cabinet Office direction;

(ii) if another accident occurs before work completed:

(a) if it is within the UK the Department of Energy, or MOD, or Scottish Office or D.Transport will take lead responsibility in accordance with existing plans;

(b) if it is outside the UK the Cabinet Office will take the lead, with individual Departments discharging their responsibilities in accordance with the nature of the accident.

2. Publication of the Interim Report?

No (not the practice to publish internal Cabinet Committee working documents of this kind). But, as in the past, the outcome of the review will in due course be publicised in contingency plans which will be made available in the usual way (in public libraries, through local liaison committees etc) as soon as practicable.

3. Why is the planning taking a long time?

- (i) a great deal of complex and detailed planning, particularly at local level, still has to be done;
- (ii) but the first stage of the review has mapped this out and the follow-up work is already under way.

4. What consultation with Local Authorities?

Will be undertaken as appropriate during the further planning. Aware of views expressed by Association of County Councils on 23 September - many of which coincide with priorities already identified ie. need for a nationwide monitoring coverage, expert assessment of the results, dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the General Public.

5. Are changes contemplated for present plans?

Present plans continue to provide a valid basis for responding to any nuclear accident in the UK. But consideration of certain detailed aspects is continuing and any changes that would serve to make the plans more effective will be made. .

6. Area from which evacuation might be required?

[The Russians evacuated an area of some 35 Km around the Chernobyl reactor]. Current UK plans incorporate evacuation up to a distance of 2-3 Km in the circumstances of what is known as a 'reference accident' (ie. the accident defined in present plans as causing the largest off-site release of radioactivity), with other public

protection measures (eg. monitoring, control of contaminated food and water supplies etc) up to some 40 Km from the site. But they provide the basis for evacuation on a larger scale, if it should prove necessary.

7. EC cooperation?

Work is continuing within the EC to set up, in the light of the Chernobyl experience, arrangements for coping more effectively with any future radiation hazards. The UK is playing a full part in that work.

8. How long will additional work take?

It will proceed with the maximum speed possible.

9. How often are plans reviewed?

A continuous process in the light of developing technology and techniques. Regular exercises are held which frequently produce lessons which lead to the review and improvement of plans.

