

Statement from HM Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations on the Implications of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident

29 March 2011

On 12 March 2011, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, requested Mike Weightman, HM Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations, to produce a report on the implications for the UK nuclear industry of the accident that took place at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power station in Japan. The purpose of the report is to identify any lessons to be learnt, taking forward this work in co-operation and co-ordination with national stakeholders and international colleagues. The Secretary of State asked for an interim report by the middle of May 2011, with a final report in September.

The Secretary of State's request has made clear that Mike Weightman has full independence to determine the scope of the report and the arrangements for conducting it. The Chief Inspector has since indicated that the reports would be:

- comprehensive and wide in scope;
- based on firm evidence and facts using the best independent scientific and technical advice available;
- informed by stakeholders with access to relevant information; and
- produced in an open and transparent way.

The reports will not address nuclear or energy policy issues as these are outside the role and responsibilities of the nuclear regulator.

It is not possible to define the final scope of the report at this stage. The events in Japan are not yet clear and relevant issues may emerge over the coming days or weeks that Mike Weightman would need to take into account in the final report. It is also possible that, once defined, the scope of the full report will need to be refined as further information becomes available. However, we can confirm that the scope for the final report will include the following broad areas:

General:

- general background on nuclear power technology and the approach to nuclear safety and security regulation in the UK, internationally and in Japan.

Events in Japan:

- a high-level description of the nuclear power station at Fukushima;
- design provisions for resilience against natural hazards;
- the events at site, including timeline and impact and actions taken to protect people;

- key on-site factors, including operator actions, contributing to the events;
- key off-site factors, including emergency response provisions, affecting the control and mitigation of events;

Lessons for the UK:

- a comparison of UK nuclear power station designs with those at Fukushima;
- natural hazards and other potential threats to UK nuclear facilities;
- potential lessons for the UK; and
- any recommendations regarding the lessons learnt.

Given the timing, and the fact that there is likely to be only limited information available, the scope for the interim report will necessarily be less comprehensive than the final report. It will focus on any immediate lessons to be learnt for existing nuclear power stations in the UK and for any prospective nuclear power stations, based on the information available up to the middle of April.

Mike Weightman is setting up an independent expert Technical Advisory Panel to assist in the report. He would also like to receive submissions from all those with technical information about the accident or thoughts about any lessons from it that can be learnt to enhance nuclear safety in the UK. We will send out further information on this in the coming days.

GDA public statement:

Following the unprecedented events in Japan, Chris Huhne, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, has asked Mike Weightman, Her Majesty's Chief Nuclear Inspector, to provide a report to the Government on the implications and any lessons to be learned for UK nuclear power stations. The reports will be put in the public domain.

As well as considering any implications for the UK's existing nuclear sites, the report will also inform the HSE's and Environment Agency's assessments for the new nuclear build programme. Industry and regulators will both need to take account of Mike Weightman's recommendations. It is too early to say what the overall impact will be on the timeframe for Generic Design Assessment and site licensing and permitting. However, as Mike Weightman's interim report is expected in May and his final report in September, we will not now be drawing conclusions from our initial GDA assessments in June 2011 as planned. We are discussing this with relevant industry stakeholders.

Safety and protection of people and the environment will always be our top priority at nuclear sites and it is important that we take the necessary time needed to ensure that we learn any relevant lessons emerging from the events in Japan.

