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(by email)

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Dear Mr Lynn

Off-Site Emergency Plan for the AWE Nuclear Licensed Sites

I am writing as an Inspector appointed by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), the statutory regulator for the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPiR'19). These regulations require that West Berkshire Council prepares an adequate off-site emergency plan (OSEP) for the AWE nuclear licensed sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield and that the plan is capable of being put into effect without delay when required.

As part of the ALDEX-23 exercise programme, the Council has recently completed its statutory duties in accordance with REPPiR' 19 to test the plan. The purpose of the test has been to demonstrate that the plan can be practicably implemented and will be effective in the response to a radiation emergency to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, the restriction of exposures to ionising radiation and the health and safety of workers and members of the public.

I consider that the Council has met the legal requirement to test the plan and report the outcomes. ALDEX-23 fulfilled its purpose of testing the OSEP and identifying lessons learned. I recognise that as a result the Council has identified actions across a number of areas of the plan. These supplement outstanding actions from previous tests and exercises, including from the modular tests which concluded in 2022 as part of ALDEX-19.

The significant expansion of the Burghfield detailed emergency planning zone in 2019 (to accommodate changes introduced in REPPiR'19), together with proposals for development of land surrounding the AWE sites, has substantially increased the number of people requiring protection in the event of a radiation emergency. This is resulting in pressures that impact on the practical implementation of the OSEP. ONR is concerned that apparent issues with the delivery of the plan will be exacerbated by further increases in population and improvements are required to address these.

In ONR's opinion, the ALDEX exercises have highlighted that key areas for improvement relate to the management of people displaced by the response to the radiation emergency, either by urgent evacuation or subsequent relocation after the period of sheltering (the protective action during the early phase of an emergency). This relates to the movement of people and the provision of monitoring and personal decontamination, in addition to welfare support.

Noting the pressures indicated, I request that the Council provides a formal response to this letter setting out the proposed actions that it will undertake to implement improvements to the OSEP to address any capacity or capability-related concerns. It should clearly identify any improvements needed for the current level of population and also identify those improvements that may be needed for any future population increases that are already committed. I would ask that a response is provided by 31st January 2024.

To provide the relevant level of regulatory oversight moving forward, we intend to carry out a series of targeted formal regulatory interventions involving the Joint Emergency Planning Unit. The purpose of these will be to gain confidence that the necessary OSEP improvements have been correctly identified and scoped, are being managed and progressed, and that these will deliver the reasonably practicable improvements to the OSEP required to satisfactorily address and mitigate current concerns.

Please contact me if you have any questions about this request.

Yours faithfully



R Dakin
Principal Inspector, Nuclear Safety

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