

30 June 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII), I would like to welcome the publication of the draft national risk assessment for comment, and in particular the recognition of the significant impact that a severe nuclear accident abroad could have on Ireland.

There are currently over 400 nuclear power plants in operation across the world, of which 185 are in Europe. A severe accident at any one of these plants could lead to radioactive contamination reaching Ireland, with the amount reaching Ireland depending on the severity of the accident and prevailing weather conditions. In 2013, the RPII published the results of a study of the potential radiological impact on Ireland of the new nuclear power plants that may be built at up to eight sites in the UK before 2025. This study included the assessment of a range of severe nuclear accidents at any one of these power plant locations. Given Ireland's distance from any current or proposed nuclear power plant locations, it is only severe accidents that are of real interest in terms of radiological implications.

The RPII's study found that while severe radiological impacts on people's health in Ireland are unlikely even following a severe accident at a nuclear power plant in the UK, food and agricultural produce could become heavily contaminated. In fact, over 90 per cent of the radiation dose following a severe accident could be from consumption of contaminated food in the event that no action was taken to prevent this. The timely introduction of appropriate agricultural management actions and food controls would substantially reduce or even eliminate most of this radiation dose. While these controls have been shown to be very effective in controlling radioactivity levels in foods for sale, and hence in reducing radiation doses to people, they do have significant socio-economic implications and costs. These effects could last for months or years following an accident, depending on its severity.

The results of the RPII's study on nuclear power plants in the UK and that of a study commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government on the risks to Ireland from incidents at the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing site are currently being used as inputs to a review of the National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents. As part of the national plan, an Irish handbook on protective actions to be taken for food and agriculture in the event of a nuclear accident has been developed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the RPII. The use of the draft handbook was recently tested in an emergency exercise, prior to its finalisation.

This handbook outlines actions that will reduce or eliminate the transfer of radioactive fallout to the foodchain following a nuclear emergency and ensure that all food on sale in Ireland is safe to eat. However, as noted in the draft Risk Assessment, even the perception of radioactive contamination could have significant socio-economic impacts for Ireland and all other countries affected, in particular for industries such as food exports and tourism. In light of this issue, the RPII is participating in an EU project which seeks to develop strategies, guidance and tools for the

management of contaminated goods, including food and animal feed. This project has a particular emphasis on inclusion of the views of producers, processors, retailers and consumers in the process. To enable this, ten national stakeholder panels have been established in European countries, including in Ireland. These panels include a wide range of stakeholders who will meet several times during the project to discuss issues including EU Regulations in the area, experiences of dealing with real and perceived contaminated products, impacts on trade and the implementation of control measures.

The above mentioned activities should give a flavour of the many actions that are continuously underway to maintain and keep up-to-date Ireland's emergency plans to deal with the consequences of a nuclear accident abroad.

Yours faithfully

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