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BNFL PRESS STATEMENT ON YORKSHIRE TV PROGRAMME

British Nuclear Fuels limited emphatically rejects claims made in a Yorkshire Television programme to be shown on Tuesday that operations at the Company's Sellafield site (formerly Windscale) may have caused cancer in children on the Cumbrian coast. The Company also deplores the fact that YTV have released details of these alarmist claims before it has completed the programme by interviewing BNFL's nominated spokesman, Mr. Peter Mummery, Director of Health and Safety. A formal complaint will be made to the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

"YTV bases its accusations on its own unvalidated findings that the incidence of cancer among children in three villages near Sellafield is higher than the national average" Mr. Mummery said today.

"In small areas variations from the national average, both upward and downward may be expected. It is well known to experts in cancer statistics that sometimes unusually high numbers can be found in relation to the size of the community. These are described as "clusters". A quick examination of some available cancer incidence statistics by BNFL has already identified a town in Cumbria some 30 miles from the coastline where a cancer cluster exists.

"The incomplete programme discussed by YTV with journalists at the weekend, ignores the studies carried out by BNFL itself on the number of deaths from cancer among those people who have worked at Windscale since nuclear operations began.

"This major epidemiological survey was discussed with the YTV programme's producer in considerable depth.

"It covers some 11,500 workers and ex workers at Sellafield. It shows that there is no greater number of deaths from cancer among the people who actually work or have worked with radioactive materials at the plant than in the population at large.

"Indeed, the total number of deaths from cancer (293) is lower than might be expected (337) among such a group on the basis of the national figures. The number of deaths from leukaemia to which YTV pay particular attention is eight with an expectation of nine. The average radiation exposure to those workers arising from operations at Sellafield is 100 times greater than it is to the general public in Cumbria.

"BNFL also intends to deal with claims made in the programme relating to the environmental effects of discharges of radioactive materials from Windscale provided that YTV uphold the promise they gave us seven months ago that we would be given a reasonable opportunity within the programme to answer any serious criticisms made against us.

"Nearly all the allegations relating to the environment raised in the programme so far were thoroughly discussed at the 100 day Windscale Inquiry held in 1977 and refuted" Mr. Mummery said. "We have continued to monitor environmental effects and published data on them regularly, discussing it with local area representatives on the Sellafield Local Liaison Committee.

We particularly object to the statement in the programme that there is a hazard to children playing and walking in the Sellafield area.

"Assuming the highest figures quoted in the programme for levels of radioactivity to be correct, children would have to eat 20 lbs of dust in a year or sit in one tiny spot on a muddy estuary for 500 hours in a year (if such a spot could still be found each time the tide has turned) before permitted limits would be reached.

"Discharges of radioactive materials from Sellafield are within the limits set by Government appointed regulatory bodies which have access to the best available scientific advice from the National Radiological Protection Board, the International Commission for Radiological Protection and a number of advisory bodies.

"Finally the programme implies that the accumulation of plutonium along the coast and in particular at Ravenglass has been taking place at an increasing rate in recent years. The reverse is the case. The amount has been decreasing reflecting the decreasing plutonium discharges. The YTV film refers to the plutonium getting into people via the lung - this is via the air they breathe. Measurements made regularly and published over many years show that the level of plutonium in the air in the Ravenglass area for example, has always been tiny by comparison with the permitted limit and is currently 1/1000th of that limit.

"In no way can the situation be described as one in which the levels are dangerous."

END

30 October, 1983