

**Press Release:**

**Environmental Health Subcommittee of West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group  
24 November 2011, Civic Hall, Cleator Moor**

At a public meeting on 24 November, the Environmental Health Subcommittee of West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group reviewed levels of Sellafield radioactivity in the West Cumbrian environment on the basis of the most recent reports (for calendar year 2010) from the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Food Standards Agency and the Environment Agency, and from Sellafield Limited.

Sellafield radioactivity makes a small contribution to annual radiation doses received by individual members of the public, depending on their activities and dietary habits. Regular surveys of activities and habits are used, together with measurements of environmental radioactivity, to estimate doses for groups of consumers likely to be most affected.

Compared with those of 30-40 years ago Sellafield discharges are now very small. However, some of the radioactivity discharged earlier remains in the marine environment. For this reason, current discharges contribute a very small proportion of radiation dose estimates for 2010. From time to time, remobilisation of old sediments contributes to increased estimates of radiation dose but a general slow decline is to be expected.

The highest doses (total from all industrial sources and pathways to man) were reported for a representative group of local consumers of very large quantities of seafood. It is estimated that in 2010, they received a dose of about 180 microsieverts, significantly less than 280 microsieverts estimated for the same quantity in 2009. Of the 2010-total, about 47 microsieverts were attributable to discharges from the former phosphate works at Whitehaven (demolished in 2004) which raised levels of natural radioactivity in the marine environment.

The reduction between 2009 and 2010 arises from changes in the amounts of seafoods consumed as well as probable settlement of sediments containing radioactivity from earlier periods.

Estimates of doses to high-rate seafood consumers at places more distant from Sellafield did not exceed 50 microsieverts. Some Ribble houseboat dwellers were estimated to have received about 160 microsieverts from external radiation emitted by estuary floor sediments.

All such dose estimates can be compared with 2,200 microsieverts received on average from natural sources of radiation in the United Kingdom.

In 2010 an elevation in radioactivity was reported for sediments from one of five road drains monitored by The Environment Agency since 1999. However, this was not sustained in samples taken from the same drains in 2011. The Environment Agency is undertaking additional monitoring to confirm that the elevation has ceased or to inform appropriate action. In either case the risk to persons and environment remain very low. The 2010 rise may have arisen from unusual weather conditions in that year releasing radioactivity trapped within the drainage path.

**John Haywood, Chairman**

## Note to Editors

The reports referred to in the press release are

Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, 2010 (RIFE-16), compiled by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science on behalf of the Environment Agency, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

[www.food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/radiosurv/rife/rife2010](http://www.food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/radiosurv/rife/rife2010)

and

Monitoring Our Environment, Discharges and Monitoring in the UK is the 2010 Annual Monitoring Report of Sellafield Limited. The monitoring reports are available on the Sellafield Sites website.

<http://www.sellafieldsites.com/about-us/environment-health-safety--quality/environment/annual-discharge--monitoring-reports>

The Environmental Health Sub-Committee of The West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group pays particular attention to the potential impact on human health of Sellafield and the Low Level Waste Repository (LLWR) Waste Management Site.

The Sub-Committee takes reports relating to the effects on the environment of operations at Sellafield and LLWR and evaluates any implications for the community.

Independent experts on this sub-committee cross reference the Site Operator's figures with those of many other sources in order to ensure that possible risks are not overlooked. Moreover, they can pursue enquiries directly with the Site Operator and Government bodies in a highly informed way. As a consequence, the concerns of the community are always taken to the right people. The Sub-Committee continues its enquiries until a resolution is secured.

EHSC meetings are public and take place on the last Thursdays in May and November.

Its documents are published on the WCSSG website.

[www.wcssg.co.uk/document-library/envirohealth-documents](http://www.wcssg.co.uk/document-library/envirohealth-documents)