

THE WHITEHAVEN NEWS

SELLAFIELD ANTI-TERRORIST REVIEW

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Sellafield is looking to see if it can strengthen its defences and minimise the risk of a disaster in the event of a terrorist attack on the site.

BNFL Director of operations Brian Watson told Sellafield's local community health and safety watchdogs that more anti-terrorist measures are still possible following the New York Twin Towers catastrophe of September 11.

Mr Watson said: "We are actively reviewing and have been since September 11 to be sure we have everything possible in place to prevent damage to plants which could lead to the release of radioactivity. We do believe our plants are robust and able to withstand significant major damage. At the same time we are looking to see whether there is anything more we can do to further protect those plants and mitigate the potential consequences."

He also told Sellafield Local Liaison Committee that while the existing Sellafield emergency plans were based on a worse-case scenario they were being reviewed as well.

Gosforth parish councillor Derek Abel drew attention to how the French government had gone further by setting up a surface-to-air missile base around Cap La Hague - Sellafield's equivalent - to combat an aerial attack.

"You might think this is an over-reaction, on the other hand one might think the UK response is an under-reaction. Maybe the right measure lies somewhere in between."

Brian Watson told the meeting: "It is a difficult balance. I don't feel best placed to judge whether the French have over-reacted or whether we have under-reacted.

"People who have to take the decisions are the ones who are getting the best intelligence of the real potential of any threat - the government is in the position to do that, it determines our security status and form a view on whether anything above and beyond what we have done so far needs to be done. Sellafield is not the only site in the UK or the western world or the USA that could be potentially subject to a further terrorist attack. We just need to take the best advice we can from government and implement accordingly. The absolute key is that we continue dialogue with community representatives and be sure you have the information you need to help provide the reassurance. It is an anxious time for everybody and I don't think it is easy to remove anxiety like this by saying words."

Mr Watson stressed: "It is important I try to give you as much reassurance as I can. We have to be absolutely prepared for all measures resulting in emergency requirements but there are some things I am not able to give answers to for obvious reasons. I do not want to make life easier for people who want to perpetrate such acts. We don't set the security alert status for Sellafield - it is done by the officer for Civil Nuclear Safety, a government dept, and since the 11th of September we have fluctuated between amber and black special. We have had to do a number of very specific things with increased checks on people and vehicles entering the site and vigilance at the perimeter fence and chicanes at the access gates."

nFriends of the Earth has claimed to a Commons Environment Committee that as many as two million people could be killed if a suicide bomber crashed into Sellafield.
