



GREEN ACTION

グリーン・アクション

Dangerous shipment of Japanese High Level Radioactive Waste Passing through the Caribbean and Panama

22 January 2010 (Kyoto, Japan)

For immediate release: A shipment of 28 canisters of Japanese vitrified high level radioactive waste departed Sellafield, UK on 20 January aboard the Pacific Sandpiper bound for Japan. Japan Nuclear Fuels Ltd. (JNFL) reported today that the route of the 6-week voyage will be through the Panama Canal. The high level waste (HLW) has been produced by the reprocessing of spent reactor fuel from Japanese electric utilities.

The Pacific Sandpiper is still operating despite having been built to the same design and construction standards as predecessor vessels decommissioned or scrapped following discovery of “run away” corrosion. Findings of a report* issued April 2009 and commissioned by NFLA (Nuclear Free Local Authorities), a coalition of more than 70 local authorities in Ireland and the UK, found this fleet to be:

- Vulnerable to build-up of gas or moisture in their double-skinned hulls, “run away corrosion.”
- 40% only single-skinned hull
- Claims ships are unsinkable “lack scientific and technical credibility.”
- Emergency plans for coping with accidents non-existent.

**Report by independent marine pollution consultant, Tim Deere-Jones. (April 2009)*

“It is unconscionable that Japan and the UK are engaging in this dangerous transport with an old, defective ship, passing it through the Caribbean with no viable emergency plan in place, just as the tragedy of the earthquake in Haiti is unfolding” stated Aileen Mioko Smith, executive director of Green Action based in Japan.

Martin Forwood of CORE (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment) is quoted as saying, “The high security surrounding today’s shipment is testament to the dangers posed by this highly radioactive material and the unwholesome global trade in which the nuclear industry is immersed. Sellafield needs to wake up to the harsh reality that today’s world and its oceans are a significantly more dangerous place than they were 30 years ago when the contracts were signed.”

This shipment is the first of many such transports scheduled for return to Japan. It is expected that Japan will receive a total of up to 1000 HLW canisters at the rate of around one shipment (4 transport flasks) from Sellafield each year.

According to the press release issued by CORE (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment) on 20 January, future shipments will be not be made on the Pacific Sandpiper (launched 1985) which, as the oldest ship of the Pacific Nuclear Transport (PNTL) fleet and already at its 25 year sell-by date, is due for retirement.