

# SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

Sunday, 16th June 2002

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**SCOTLAND on SUNDAY**  
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Full security checks at 22 of the 31 nuclear power stations and waste reprocessing stations have been canceled due to a recruitment crisis.

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## Terror check at Britain's nuclear sites

STEPHEN FRASER

SECURITY inspections of Britain's nuclear facilities to ensure they are safe from terrorist attack have been abandoned because of a chronic staff shortage.

The government's own director of civil nuclear security has admitted that a recruitment crisis in his office has forced him to cancel full security checks at 22 of the 31 nuclear power stations and waste reprocessing stations it regulates.

The admission, which casts doubt on government claims of increased security in the wake of September 11, has shocked experts and MPs.

The revelation comes in the first annual report of the Office of Civil Nuclear Security, the government agency responsible for protecting Britain's civil nuclear sites, including five in Scotland.

The office's director, Michael Buckland-Smith, admits that he has been forced to cancel 'compliance inspections' at 22 facilities after the attack on the Twin Towers.

Instead, his staff had switched to giving ad hoc security advice and would not have enough staff to resume inspections until next month at the earliest.

Buckland-Smith, who has five inspectors among his staff, admitted his agency was suffering a recruitment crisis and had lost staff with police or security service experience to private sector companies who could pay more.

He said: "I have lost two experienced inspectors over the past 18 months and faced considerable difficulty and delay recruiting replacements. Unfortunately, four of my most experienced staff are either retiring or leaving in the next 12 months, compounding the difficulties we anticipate finding suitably qualified replacements and filling new posts."

Earlier in the report Buckland-Smith admits: "It is impossible without a thorough and comprehensive programme of site inspections undertaken by experts, to identify security weaknesses or monitor compliance with standards and regulations."

Buckland-Smith also said his agency had discovered "deficiencies" in the security arrangements adopted by a number of facilities, though he did not give full details.

He did, however, reveal one incident at an unnamed power station two years ago when a security guard, who was later sacked, had attempted to sneak an unauthorised person into the plant.

Buckland-Smith refused to answer questions on his report but a Department of

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Trade and Industry spokesman admitted: "Compliance inspections involve a lot of paperwork, so we have concentrated on offering security advice though we will resume inspections as soon as possible. We are confident the regulator's staff issues can be resolved through the introduction of pay incentives."

Dr John Large, an independent nuclear safety consultant who advised the Russian Federation on the salvage of the Kursk nuclear submarine, said the failure to carry out compliance inspections meant security at facilities could not be fully tested.

He said: "You cannot test the response of nuclear plants to a terrorist threat by having cosy chats over a coffee with the plant's security people. Dropping compliance inspection is like handing a driving licence to somebody without putting them through a test."

He said compliance inspections involve a group of inspectors running exercises to test the reaction of site staff to different scenarios. The scenarios might involve a simulated attack by terrorists or mock acts of sabotage by insiders.

"Compliance inspections are the best way of winking out weaknesses in a plant's defences and systems," added Large, a former research scientist for the UK Atomic Energy Authority.

Tam Dalyell, the Labour MP for Linlithgow, said he was "extremely concerned".

"The quid pro quo for having nuclear facilities is that no corners are cut in the regulation of the security regime covering plants and these staff shortages must mean corners have been cut."

The OCNS regulates security at Scotland's four nuclear power stations, Torness, Hunterston A and B, and Chapelcross. It is also responsible for checking security at the UK Atomic Energy Authority's plant at Dounreay.

It is not clear whether any of the five facilities are included in those that have had compliance inspections. The safety of nuclear facilities is regulated by a separate agency, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Richard Dixon, the head of research for the Friends of the Earth Scotland, said the report was "damning". "If I were a terrorist, looking at this report and scouting out what is happening with the nuclear industry across the world, I would be heading to Britain because our nuclear facilities look like a soft touch."

British Energy, the private company which operates Torness and Hunterston B power stations, and the state-owned UKAEA, which controls Dounreay, both insisted their security arrangements were extremely tight in the wake of September 11.



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