



Ministry of Defence

Our Ref: FOI2020/02845

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\(MULTIUSER\)](#)

Via email: [REDACTED]

28 April 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email requesting the following information:

I should be grateful if you would provide me with the following information which I believe is held by the Ministry of Defence relating to abnormal events recorded at the Atomic Weapons Establishment in 2019.

Please provide me with a copy of the incident report for each abnormal incident with the potential to challenge a nuclear safety system, and which was reported to a regulator, recorded at the Atomic Weapons Establishment between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2019 inclusive.

As confirmed previously, we have treated your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and we can advise that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) holds information in scope of your request.

We attach a spreadsheet generated from AWE's database containing incident reports for each abnormal incident that occurred between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2019 inclusive with the potential to challenge a nuclear safety system, and which was reported to the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

However, as notified in previous correspondence, some of the information you requested falls within the scope of qualified exemptions Section 24 (National Security) and Section 26 (Defence) provided for within the Act, and a public interest test has been conducted. The Act presumes disclosure and we have, where possible, taken this into account. However, it is assessed that in some areas the greater interest lies in withholding some of the information requested.

Section 24(1) (National Security) has been applied to some of the information requested. It is considered that revealing building identifiers would be likely to enable hostile forces to construct a detailed picture of the layout of the AWE sites. Site profiling can be built up when this apparently innocuous information is used in conjunction with other widely available data, such as aerial maps, ordnance survey information. Some information has also been withheld as its release would allow the reader to gain an understanding of details of the manufacture of nuclear warheads and consequently could be used by an adversary or third-party state to undermine the UK's strategic deterrent or to aide in the

development of a device, which would be prejudicial to our obligations and interests in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Section 26(1)(b) (Defence) has also been applied to information relating to the Warhead technical and capability related information as well as details of the areas within AWE where specific work takes place. Releasing this information would be likely to pose a direct threat to the defence of the UK, as potential adversaries would be able to build up a picture of the UK's overall capabilities. The very nature of the deterrent requires information on its capabilities to be withheld so that it remains effective in its role as a strategic defensive weapon. It is judged that the disclosure of all the information would be likely to prejudice the defence of the UK and may degrade the effectiveness of the unbroken Continuous At Sea Deterrent, which protects the entire population. Section 24(1) and Section 26(1)(b) are therefore engaged, and the balance of public interest has been found to lie in favour of withholding some of the information.

Under Section 16(1) of the Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance to requesters, so it may be helpful if we explain that in late 2018, AWE changed their Event categorisation process. This introduced a new accountability and escalation framework. All incidents are reported in a database, where they undergo a review process to sanction the level of investigation required. This improvement together with the Event categorisation process helps to ensure that all incidents are dealt with in an appropriate, proportionate manner.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

Defence Nuclear Organisation Secretariat

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AWE FOI: Case Reference IR20-004: Date Received 16/03/2020						
Title: Abnormal incidents with the potential to challenge a nuclear safety system and reported to a regulator.						
Event number	Title	Date Occurred	Date Reported	Location	Precise Location (Where Stated)	Originator's Description
1-45ES2E	Safety mechanism on chuck failed to operate correctly	15/03/2019 10:33	15/03/2019 10:33	█████	██████████	whilst carrying out normal operations to lift the ██████ vacuum chuck it noticed that while the chuck was being raised that the safety fingers did not move fully to come under the ██████ that was in the chuck. The operation was stopped by the DAP and the chuck was lowered back into place a DRP was raised to find the best way to remove the chuck.
1-45UCOM	Cooling water leak	29/03/2019 10:19	29/03/2019 12:19	A90.1	██████████	Cooling water leak from ██████ onto the lab floor with limited flow to the ground floor.
1-4674TC	Bus bar bent during lifting	18/04/2019 11:58	18/04/2019 11:58	A90.1	██████████	Bus bar clamps failed to disengage
1-46A1MY	██████████ VACUUM CHUCK SAFETY LEVERS NOT OPERATING CORRECTLY	29/04/2019 11:22	29/04/2019 11:22	█████		During processing operations, the ██████ vaccum chuck safety levers failed to engage fully. DAP intervened and applied finger pressure to segmented ring to allow safty levers to engage beneath the component being held.
1-46EY40	Contactora in MCC compartment found to have fused	11/05/2019 13:00	11/05/2019 14:41	A90.1	North switchroom	The motor 10-FA-5007AMA was found to be running when it should be on standby. After further investigation it was found that at MCC compartment 10-EE-5003 CF01 that the contactora was fused shut so the motor was constantly running. The supply fuses and the motor itself was found hot to the touch. We then proceeded to isolate the motor at the MCC compartment authorised by the APE.
1-46Q2QS	Inadvertent machining of material in ██████	12/06/2019 16:42	13/06/2019 13:42	A90.1		A planned operation led to the inadvertent machining of material in ██████ This was not intended and as such an AE has been rasied.
1-479E9Y	Design review for new component resulted in a compliance check and potential shortfalls were identified	08/08/2019 15:11	08/08/2019 15:11	A90.1	A90.1, ██████████	During a review of a modified component, questions were asked regarding the impact upon the written scheme of examination, a requirement of the Pressure Systems Safety Regulations. Further investigation identified that the process equipment under review (██████████) did not appear to have a written scheme or any

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						associated scheduled maintenance. The process equipment [REDACTED] and the safety equipment ([REDACTED] and other items) were among those items with no scheduled maintenance. Equipment removed from service by Mechanical SAP. Certificate of Isolation Reference: 107454. Out of Service Certificate Reference: 1508.
1-47EML4	[REDACTED] Vacuum hose not correctly interfacing with chuck, causing safety fingers to not engage	28/08/2019 12:10	28/08/2019 13:06	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	Whilst lifting the [REDACTED] Vacuum chuck from the unit it was noticed by the operators that the safety fingers did not engage. It was found that the Vacuum hose actuator did not fully depress the ring barrel catch which allows the safety fingers to engage. PR603956 was raised to reject the Vacuum hose.
1-47IF3A	[REDACTED] opened at same time	04/09/2019 21:57	04/09/2019 21:57	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	Whilst attempting to close the [REDACTED] an operator managed to open the [REDACTED] resulting in [REDACTED] open at the same time
EVE00001148	Failure of adherence to KSA 1.1A	31/10/2019 11:30	05/11/2019 07:02	A90.1	[REDACTED]	A move was submitted from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] which requires the use of [REDACTED]. The [REDACTED] is located at [REDACTED] which was restricted at the time of the move request due to a [REDACTED]. When the two operators involved in the move were contact by an MCT operator, they had admitted to not visually checking the [REDACTED] - including the relevant CCC etc. After the lab(s) were derestricted, they had contacted MCT to inform them that the [REDACTED] check had now been completed; however, [REDACTED] Datakeys were still at [REDACTED] meaning either A) the check hadn't, in fact, been completed; B) one operator had checked the [REDACTED] while the other watched over [REDACTED] Datakeys (which is a defiance of TPR for the OHT check, and a Datakey was technically left unattended), or C) [REDACTED] Datakeys were left unattended.