



Ministry
of Defence

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Our Ref: FOI2020/06381

6 July 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

We apologise for the delay in responding to your Freedom of Information request. Further to our email dated 5th June 2020, we are writing to provide a substantive response to your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for the following information:

“... any information regarding the four research reactors - Horace, Herald, Vera and Viper - which were operated by the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston.... ... when each of the reactors went critical, how they were cooled and moderated, what their thermal capacity was, how they were used, and when they were shut down”

A search for the information has been completed and we can confirm that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) holds some information in scope of your request. As your request is loosely bounded, we needed to determine whether providing the information was likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress, by creating a burden on the subject matter experts, requiring them to spend a substantial amount of time considering any exemptions and redactions to the information in scope of your request. However, due to current COVID restrictions on working practices, it has not been possible to retrieve original documentation and therefore information has been extracted from various datasets by our subject matter experts and that information is presented in the attached accessible format.

Under section 16(1) of the Act, we have a duty to provide advice and assistance so far as it would be reasonable to expect the authority to do so. Therefore, you may find it of interest to know that the Atomic Weapons Establishment has operated a total of 4 research reactors at its Aldermaston site between 1957 and 2008; HERALD, HORACE, VERA and VIPER. Managed by the Nuclear Applications division of the then Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, the reactors were constructed to support both the defence and civil research programmes being carried out by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority as well as wider UK nuclear industry, covering a range of experimental applications including neutron physics, nuclear data verification and materials testing.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, are not satisfied with this response or wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact us in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for 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 their website at <http://www.ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

Defence Nuclear Organisation Secretariat