Press release: Chemical event at Sellafield, 21 October 2017

Following a chemical inventory audit in a laboratory, we took the decision to dispose of a number of chemicals which are no longer used in our operations and have been stored since 1992.

In line with best practice and established procedures, we alerted the relevant partner agencies and sought advice on managing this material in accordance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations.

Update at 10:40 Saturday 21 October

- This is not a radiological event

- The chemicals are contained within a small number of canisters. These need to be removed and disposed of appropriately.

- The materials involved are solvents which are widely used in industry.

- They will be disposed of in a controlled manner.

- An area of the site is cordoned off as a precaution — but the rest of the site is operational and the majority of our staff who would be in at the weekend are at work and working normally.

- The army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team deal with hundreds of these issues every year, recovering chemicals from science laboratories in places like schools and universities.

- These chemicals are used extensively in many industries and are well understood.

- Because this is happening on the Sellafield site we exercise extreme caution and leave nothing to chance.

Background

As is usual in these scenarios, a specialised unit was invited to attend the Sellafield site to assess the material and advise on its safe disposal.

That team, from the army's Explosives Ordinance Disposal Team, will dispose

of the material safely.

They will dig a trench, bury the canisters using sandbags, and detonate them in a controlled manner. This will create a noise that will be audible off-site, but there is no need for alarm.

The chemicals involved are solvents, such as Tetrahydrofuran, which are potentially flammable in liquid states and can crystallise and become unstable when exposed to air (oxygen) Crystallisation takes a number of days.