

Ref: FOI2023-020

[REDACTED]

20th July 2023

Dear [REDACTED],

Further to our previous correspondence regarding your request for the following information:

I am currently working on a project researching the Calder Hall/Windscale plants in Cumbria in and around the early 1950's. I know the plutonium that was made there had to be transported to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston. I would like to know the size of this sample and how it was transported. Obviously there were no motorways and I believe it was transported by vehicle and not rail. Any information would be gratefully received. I know that in the 1950's there was pressure on the UK to detonate a hydrogen bomb so as to be at the top table re world events. The possession of nuclear weapons by the UK is of great historical interest and the legacy of the testing is fascinating.

Is there any information on how the samples were transported, by whom, and what size was the container that the sample was in?

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

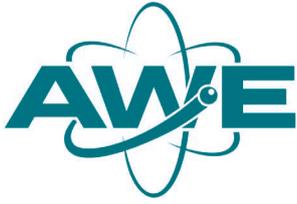
A search for the requested information within the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) has now been completed, and we can confirm that information in scope of your request is held.

Taking each element of your request in turn:

We are writing to advise that following a search of our paper and electronic records, we have established that the information you requested relating to the size of the sample is held by the MoD, this is exempt from disclosure under Section 21, of the Freedom of Information Act, being information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means, Section 21 is an absolute exemption and AWE (Atomic Weapons Establishment) is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure the details can be found on page 9 of the report: <https://fissilematerials.org/library/mod00.pdf>

We can confirm that AWE holds data concerning *how plutonium was moved from Windscale to Aldermaston*. However, we must advise you that we are applying Section 14(1) of the Act, as compliance would impose a disproportionate burden on the public authority and would divert resources from essential defence business activities.

Under Section 16(1) of the Act public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance, so far as it is reasonable to expect the authority to do so. Therefore, it may be helpful if we explain the reasons why this request will impose a disproportionate burden on the public authority.



The Ministry of Defence (MOD) are currently undertaking a review of nuclear information held in records that were released to The National Archives (TNA). As part of the review process, a collection of records (including many relating to the early development of military and civil nuclear technology) has been temporarily withdrawn from general access to mitigate any potential national security risk. AWE are providing the specialist Subject Matter Expert (SME) knowledge required to conduct the review.

The information you have requested is contained within files that have been previously reviewed for release in accordance with the Public Records Act 1958 (PRA) and found to contain sensitive material. As such, these documents have been withheld from public release and are retained by the MOD under the Lord Chancellor's Instrument 118, which allows for the retention of records relating to the defence applications of atomic and nuclear energy. A rolling review is undertaken of these files by AWE, and all have been consistently withheld in their entirety under this instrument.

Whilst the files in scope of this request were not released to the TNA and therefore not withdrawn from public access as part of the ongoing security review, they are very closely related to those documents under review. Consequently, as the effort to fully assess the contents of the files falls to the same small cadre of suitably qualified and experienced people it is our belief that this request will impose a disproportionate burden on the public authority.

Therefore based on the rationale for the security review currently underway, and the fact that previous PRA reviews have found that the files contain sensitive information, we can be satisfied that any potentially exempt information is spread throughout the documentation, and not easily isolated. To comply with this request under the terms of the Act would require AWE to divert resource from other tasks, specifically those SMEs working on the wider security review, to conduct a line-by-line assessment to identify any potential harm from disclosure before release can be authorised. In the circumstances of this case, such action would have a significant impact on the current schedule and effectiveness of the review process and the ability of the SMEs to work on other tasks associated with the nuclear programme.

The work required to process this request is disproportionate when balanced against the public interest in ensuring that the security review of the files, including those which have been withdrawn from public view at TNA, is completed at its earliest opportunity, enabling as many records as possible to be opened to the public again. Adjustments to the schedule and diversion of resources to consider requests made through the Act would undoubtedly place a significant burden on the Authority and disrupt the wider security review.

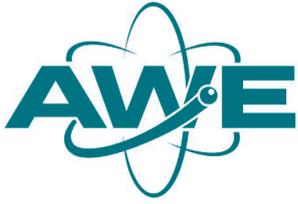
You may find it helpful to note that the MOD has released a number of updates on the ongoing security review and the current assessment process, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-nuclear-archive-records>.

You may also find it helpful to contact Sellafield, if you have not already done so, they can be contacted at:

enquiries@sellafieldsites.com

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.



Aldermaston ▪ Reading
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If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to information.requests@awe.co.uk or our postal address: Information Requests Team, AWE Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4PR. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team