GlobalResearch
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Seven Years Ago, UK Environment Agency Warned that 12 of Our 19 Nuclear Sites Were in Danger of Flooding and Erosion

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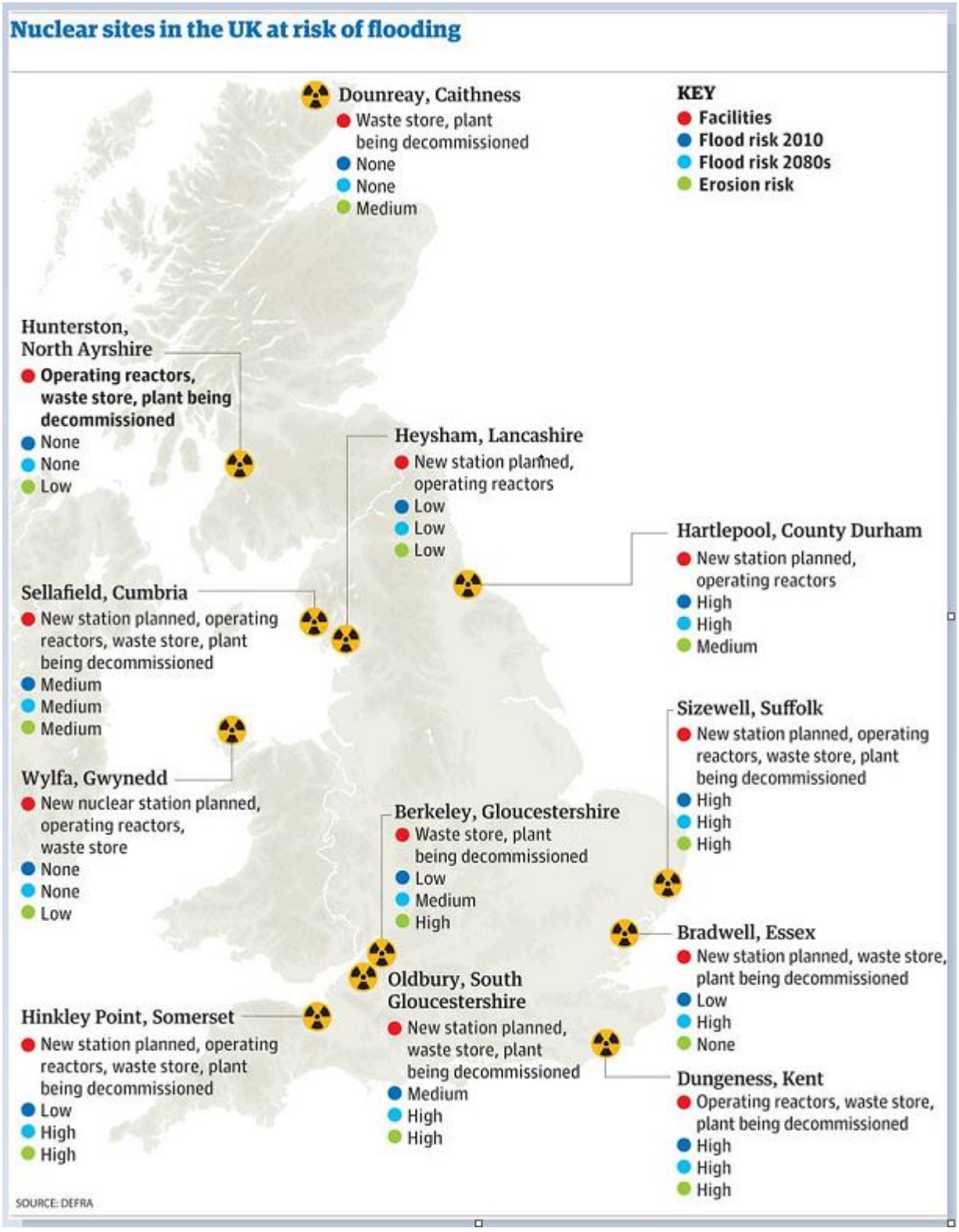
Global Research, June 26, 2018
Nuclear Industries 25 June 2018

Region: Europe
Theme: Environment, Oil and Energy

Featured image: The 'high risk' Sizewell nuclear power plant, seen from Southwold, Suffolk. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

In the Guardian recently, ***Paul Brown*** *reminded us that in 2012 a document obtained under the Freedom of Information Act showed that the Environment Agency was warning that 12 out of the UK's 19 nuclear sites were in danger of coastal flooding and erosion because of climate change. Among them was Hinkley Point in Somerset, one of the eight proposed sites for new nuclear power stations around the coasts.*



The analysis was conducted by officials from the floods and coastal erosion team (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra) as part of a major investigation into the impact of climate change on the UK. But when the results were published in January 2012 only summary numbers for the 2080s were mentioned and no individual sites were named.

That was before the increasing volume of melting of the Greenland ice cap was properly understood and when most experts thought there was no net melting in the Antarctic.

Now we read that melting ice sheets are hastening sea level rise and satellite

measurements and that warmer seas are eroding ice shelves and glaciers. Estimates of sea level rise in the next 50 years have gone up from less than 30cm to more than a metre, well within the lifespan of the nuclear stations the UK government has planned.

Defra has now released its full analysis in response to a request under freedom of information legislation. As a result, the department's assessments of the risks for individual sites can be disclosed for the first time. Seven of those sites containing radioactive waste stores are judged to be at some risk of flooding now, with a further three at risk of erosion by the 2080s.

Nuclear power generation, waste and decommissioning sites – Summary of impacts

Site	New site?	Waste Store?	NDA site?	Flood Risk 2010	Flood Risk 2020s	Flood Risk 2050s	Flood Risk 2080s	Erosion risk
Berkeley				Yes (low)	Yes	Yes	Yes (medium)	Yes (high)
Bradwell				Yes (low)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	No
Capenhurst				No	No	No	No	No
Chapelcross				No	No	No	No	No
Culham				No	No	No	No	No
Dounreay				No	No	No	No	Yes (medium)
Drigg				No	No	No	No	No
Dungeness				Yes (high)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	Yes (high)
Hartlepool				Yes (high)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	Yes (medium)
Harwell				No	No	No	No	No
Heysham				Yes (low)	Yes	Yes	Yes (low)	Yes (low)
Hinkley Point				Yes (low)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	Yes (high)
Hunterston				No	No	No	No	Yes (low)
Oldbury				Yes (medium)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	Yes (high)
Sellafield				Yes (medium)	Yes	Yes	Yes (medium)	Yes (medium)
Sizewell				Yes (high)	Yes	Yes	Yes (high)	Yes (high)
Trawsfynnydd				No	No	No	No	No
Winfrith				No	No	No	No	No
Wylfa				No	No	No	No	Yes (low)

[1] Indicative flood plain
[2] Elevation in m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD)
[3] Highest Astronomical Tide

Experts suggested the main concern was of inundation causing nuclear waste leaks.

> "Sea level rise, especially in the south-east of England, will mean some of these sites will be under water within 100 years," said **David Crichton**, a flood specialist and honorary professor at the hazard research centre at University College London. "This will make decommissioning expensive and difficult, not to mention the recovery and movement of nuclear waste to higher ground."

The extra coastal erosion and threat of storm surges that this increase in sea level will bring to our shores might make sensible people think twice about siting any buildings in vulnerable places, let alone nuclear power stations.

So far, however, the government has yet to respond and is pressing ahead with its plans.

The Moseley reader who drew attention to this issue sends a useful link to a government report on rising sea levels (cover above right) with reference to nuclear issues on Page 15

and comments:

"Worrying, as it demonstrates yet more short term thinking by government, the members of which will be long gone when the problems are evident.

> **"Perhaps they should be forced to make all decisions based on the lives of their grandchildren; which would be forfeit should things go wrong!"**

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