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Whilst I have many objections to the proposed waste incinerator, one of my key concerns is the threat of fire at the site. This was triggered by the considerable press coverage about the rising number of fires attributable to lithium-ion batteries every year.

When I looked into this, I found that 48% of all waste fires are caused by these batteries – over 200 per annum according to the National Fire Chiefs Council. The Council also confirmed that fires at waste management facilities are on the rise – UK Fire and Rescue attended approximately 300 significant fires at waste sites last year.

Presumably some of these fires are easily tackled but there are a disconcerting number of major incidents that demonstrate how significant of a risk fire could be.

In May this year there was a major fire and explosion at a waste incineration site in Amsterdam.

In the UK in 2019 there were two major fires at waste incineration sites. At Beddington which took eight hours to bring under control and later that same year at Rainham, which had around 40 firefighters in attendance.

Whilst the increasing number of fires at waste sites is of general concern, the Portland site has an additional circumstance that is likely to make any fire or explosion more hazardous.

Portland Bunkers UK, which supplies fuel to ships in the harbour, has four storage tanks with a total capacity of 44,000 cubic meters and their large diameter above ground fuel supply pipe for ships bunkering runs directly on the incinerator site boundary. Due to the high volume of flammable fuel stored at the terminal, the organisation is regulated by and follows legislation set out in the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH). Portland Bunkers have quite rightly submitted an objection to the proposed waste incinerator.

Portland Port provides an operational berth for Royal Navy nuclear powered warships and the proposed site is located within the DEPZ (Detailed Emergency Planning Zone) and falls under the impact of Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations 2019 (REPPiR).

Consequently, The Office for Nuclear Regulation and Ministry of Defence have responded to the planning request and commented that, “The business should demonstrate that its operation does not pose any specific risk/increased risk ... including explosive risks, or more conventional ones, including an increased fire risk ...”, which the evidence suggests there is.

One further point. The MoD and Office for Nuclear Regulation’s response, also drew attention to the significantly increased traffic within the Port and via the main gate as waste is being transported to the incinerator by road and points out that the increased traffic and potential vehicle queues at the main gate could delay or hinder the response of Emergency Services. As such they recommend that operations are stopped whilst any Nuclear-Powered Warships are in port.

If this is necessary to stop operations in order ensure safety when a nuclear powered warship is visiting, surely it is reasonable for locals to be concerned on any normal operational day. In all major incidents at incinerators the site has had to be evacuated. Emergency vehicles attending a fire or explosion at the Portland waste site would be impacted by the same increased traffic and vehicle queues at the main gate and the single road access to Portland across the Causeway.