

Motunui output slashed

Petrol production resumed at the damaged Synfuel gas to gasoline plant at Motunui today but output has been slashed by more than half.

The cost would be \$2 million a week in lost production, according to a Ministry of Energy spokesman.

Synfuel's general manager, Mr Phil Aplin, said the complex would produce 750 tonnes of petrol a day — as against the usual daily average 1600 tonnes.

Reduced output would continue until the second methanol plant could be repaired, and Mr Aplin would not venture an estimate on when repairs would be completed or how much they would cost.

The cause of the failure, he said, would be the subject of a detailed assessment that could take several weeks.

The Methanol No 2 plant was shut on Sunday following a failure in the re-

former furnace.

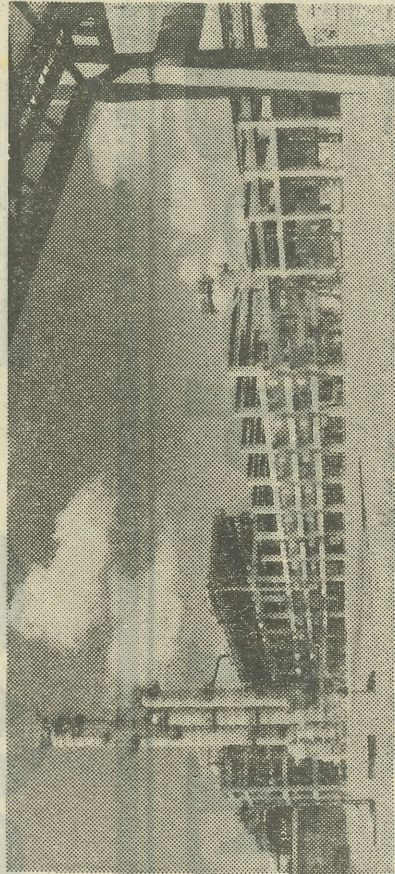
Mr Aplin said the furnace contained 680 tubes loaded with a catalyst. Many of the tubes were damaged in the failure.

A metallurgical inspection of each tube was required. "There has been no structural damage or damage to the inside of the furnace, other than to the tubes."

Mr Aplin said a Synfuels purchasing team had begun a worldwide search for a total replacement set of the high temperature alloy tubes.

"Whether all would be required is not yet known."

An insurance claim had already been lodged under Synfuel's all risks policy.



Motunui... repair price speculation.

Vulnerability revealed

The major failure of the Motunui synfuel plant highlights a key finding by the study team that reported last week on the consequences for New Zealand of a major nuclear war, the Planning Council said.

The report noted the vulnerability of the Think Big energy projects in their reliance on overseas expertise and resources for advice and spare parts to maintain the facility.

Synfuel said today the damage to its Motunui gas conversion complex by a major plant failure was quite extensive.

Project leader for the Nuclear Impact Study Dr Wren Green said American engineers had had to be flown in to assess the damage. The company was also awaiting help from the plant's New York designers.

"Presumably, any new parts will rely heavily on overseas manufacture as well

to restore the plant to full production," Dr Green said.

"Our point is that after nuclear war, none of this outside help would exist. The crucial question is, would local engineering firms have the ability to repair the plant if they had to rely entirely on their own local resources?"

In the tragic event of a nuclear war, all the usual supplies from the Northern Hemisphere would not be available, said Dr Green. Such a failure could have a catastrophic effect on New Zealand's petrol supplies.

Till this week New Zealand produced two-thirds of the petrol it uses, the rest is refined from imported crude oil.

"If half the synfuel plant closed down, we would be down to one-third of normal petrol supply. This would create enormous extra problems for rationing

remaining production and have other major flow-on effects on whatever economic activity persists after such a war," said Dr Green.

The unfortunate failure of the synfuel plant also highlighted the importance of investigating in greater detail other vulnerable activities as part of the second phase following the study.

People should be making submissions on areas of vulnerability to the Ministry for the Environment, Dr Green said.

He added the study team was pleased to see how positively the Government responded to the report by calling for submissions on what a second phase might involve.

"Widespread public input to that process is very important," Dr Green said. — NZPA