

in remote places was now possible. The minister was acting on advice given him by the Nuclear Safety Advisory Committee, which had said that the principal safeguard to public health came from the high standards of design, construction and operation of nuclear stations. For gas cooled reactors built in pre-stressed concrete vessels, it was clear that it was safe to build them much nearer to cities than had been customary. Mr Marsh said that this meant any area with a population density sufficiently light to evacuate the people within a range of 1.5 to 2 miles in the unlikely event of an accident. He agreed that this included the areas around Hartlepoons and Heysham, both possible sites for nuclear stations.

The decision raises some interesting issues. Although most people agree that a relaxation of the restrictions is timely, particularly in Britain where isolated sites are hard to find, the decision of the committee refers only to British gas cooled reactors. What would happen if the generating boards decided to build a water reactor in the United States style (as they have sometimes threatened to do) is not made clear. A direct comparison of the safety of the two reactor types has not been made—so far both have a completely clean record, although it has been suggested that gas cooled reactors are inherently safer. The decision also clears the way for the generating boards to replace some of their older coal fired stations with nuclear stations, making better use of sites nearer to towns. As the map shows, all British nuclear stations so far built are in fairly remote areas, which has tended to increase the costs of building and of transmitting the power to the point of use.



In other parts of the world which lack the sophisticated grid system in operation in Britain, the advantages of building near towns may be even greater. This, it is hoped, may help the export of British power stations, perhaps to Germany. As Mr Eric Lubbock mentioned in the short debate in the Commons, a power station is to be built near Ludwigshafen in West

Germany; Mr Marsh pointed out that another is to be built within 20 miles of Hamburg. The fact that Britain is now willing to build as near as this to towns will lend some weight to the tenders made by British consortia. In the United States, Consolidated Edison did once propose to build a station in New York, but were dissuaded by the Atomic Energy Commission. Despite this, the same tendency for generating stations to get ever nearer to towns has been observed in the United States. One of the problems which dictates a cautious advance, however, is the way in which the size of nuclear stations has increased. In this sense, Mr Marsh is disingenuous to claim that Britain has 132 nuclear years of experience. Until Dungeness B starts operating, Britain has no actual experience of a commercial advanced gas cooled reactor. The experience is on the less sophisticated—and generally smaller—magnox reactors.

Kidney Transplants

THE ethical problems of transplanting organs are to be discussed at a conference announced on February 14 by Mr Kenneth Robinson, Minister of Health. The conference will be chaired by Sir Hector MacLennan, President of the Royal Society of Medicine, and will include lawyers, leading churchmen and laymen as well as doctors. Although the conference will be private, there seems some chance at least of a joint communiqué being issued after it is over. The ministry has emphasized that the purpose of the conference is to discuss the problems that have arisen in the provision of kidneys for transplant operations in Britain, and not to embark on lengthy discussions of the more controversial subject of heart transplants. So far, because there have been no heart transplant operations in Britain, the discussion of the subject has been less acrimonious than elsewhere, but there have already been signs of sharp disagreement. The minister will be hoping to steer the discussion away from such potentially dangerous topics.

Kidney transplantation is a much less heated subject; almost everybody agrees that in principle it is a very good thing. But technical difficulties over the provision of kidneys from donors have at times made the surgeon's task harder than it might have been. Some surgeons feel that the law should be amended so that kidneys could be taken from fatally injured people without consent from relatives. The difficulty here is that the kidney must be removed from the patient very soon after death if it is to be of any use to the patient.

Guidance for Universities

BRITISH universities have now been provided with some cautious guidance on the degree to which lecture rooms and laboratories are being used. This information is the first product of the work of the sub-committee under Mr C. F. Carter, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lancaster, which has been brooding on the utilization of university facilities for the best part of a year. The report now being sent to universities is based on a survey in sixteen institutions which has been carried out by Mr K. S. Davies, the research officer attached to the project by the vice-chancellors' committee. At this stage it is clear that everybody is anxious not to let the universities feel that they are being coerced into a uniform pattern of teaching, and