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$9m network for instant detection of radioactivity

AN early warning system to be installed at Daya Bay will detect radioactive leaks immediately, according to the Royal Observatory.

The $9 million Early Alerting Network of communications equipment will relay information via microwave from Daya Bay to the Royal Observatory's Radiation Monitoring and Assessment Centre.

Information could then be passed on to the police and media in the event of a mishap.

Radiation could reach Peng Chao island in three hours in a worst-case scenario.

Already in place are dozens of detection devices called "thermoluminescent dissemeters" throughout the territory, along with four ionisation chambers which can measure radiation levels instantly.

"Our job is radiation monitoring," said Dr H K Lam, acting assistant director at the observatory.

The observatory yesterday gave reporters a tour of new equipment and explained new high-tech detection and forecasting methods.

China Light and Power has a 25 per cent stake in the nuclear power station, a $28.8 billion joint venture with China.

The observatory is currently involved in collecting data on radiation levels in rainwater, soil, the seabed and food and cross-referring the data with new samples when the power station comes on line in 1992.

A French-built Pressurised Water Reactor, 90 of which operate in France today, will be the centrepiece of the facility.

Bechtel Corporation, the US engineering firm that has the overall project management contract for the new airport at Chek Lap Kok, is also working on quality assurance capacity at Daya Bay.