

DRIFTING wartime mines, many British, could cause a nuclear disaster in the Clyde, or even trigger a confrontation with Russia, it was claimed yesterday.

The mines, each containing up to 1200lb of high explosive, are capable of rupturing the hulls and nuclear reactor compartments of the British and American missile submarines operating from Faslane and Holy Loch.

There are also fears that one of the nuclear-powered Soviet hunter-killer submarines, which

wait off the Firth of Clyde to monitor Western missile patrols leaving the river, could be damaged or destroyed.

Mr George Foulkes, Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, last night described the situation as "a powder keg which could lead to a calamity of huge proportions."

He has written to Defence Secretary Mr George Younger demanding to know what measures are being taken to avert a potential disaster in the waters off the Ayrshire coast.

He said: "It is a very worrying scenario. It could be nearly as bad as Chernobyl. And if a submarine belonging to a third power was involved the strategic

implications become just too frightening to contemplate."

Referring to a Glasgow Herald investigation which today reveals that millions of tons of mines, bombs, shells, and bullets were secretly dumped into the sea west of Cairnryan between 1947 and 1959, he added: "I am becoming increasingly concerned about the area being used as a dumping ground for lethal debris.

"I was not aware that this had been done and I am appalled. It is clearly a case of the south of Scotland being out of sight and out of mind. However, the powers who authorise the disposal of huge

quantities of explosives in our coastal waters obviously did not contemplate the area becoming the most important strategic area in Europe.

"My letter to Mr Younger, whose own constituency of Ayr is one of potential victims of circumstance, should arrive on his desk in the morning."

A Ministry of Defence spokesman said last night: "The navigable channels in and out of the Clyde are as clear as we can be reasonably sure. Over the years, various seabed surveys

have been carried out, both in these channels and elsewhere.

"We can be professionally certain that there are no buoyant weapons with a war charge that could be adrift in the Clyde. Munitions with a war charge would be on the bottom, inert and harmless, unless disturbed by trawling fishermen's nets, for example.

"Anything fundamentally anti-ship would have been disarmed. Shells and other munitions would not be dangerous unless deliberately disturbed or treated violently. We don't believe that any anti-ship mines were deliberately dumped. Nothing of that nature has yet been discovered."

As well as the deliberate dumping of munitions, there are a number of Second World War aircraft wrecks on the seabed. Many crashed either going out on or returning from combat missions, and some would inevitably have gone down with a weapons load on board.

In recent months there have been three reported incidents involving Second World War mines or torpedoes in the vital nuclear-training area around Arran.

In the latest a small fishing boat snagged an aerial mine in its nets. The mine was later blown up by the Navy near Ailsa Craig, after being towed out of Girvan.

The Ministry of Defence claimed later it was "a practice torpedo," but the fishermen involved told the Herald the naval divers had identified it as a British Second World War mine of the type dropped by aircraft to blockade enemy ports.

Inquiries have also disclosed that a contingency plan, known as the Clyde Area Public Safety Scheme, has already been drawn up to cope with "nuclear reactor emergencies" involving British or American submarines in the Clyde.

The scheme involves the Navy and the administrative heads of all relevant district councils on the Clyde, as well as health authorities, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the police.

In the event of leakage of radiation from a stricken submarine, one of two coded messages would be sent out by the Commodore Clyde, the senior naval officer at Faslane. Dusky One indicates that a radioactive emission is likely to occur, Dusky Two means that it has.

In the worst extreme, regarded by the Navy as "highly unlikely," civilians in an affected area could be evacuated, livestock slaughtered, and the area sealed off.

The Navy has designated a number of berths to be used in emergency, many of them near populated areas such as Rothesay, Arran and Campbeltown.

There are also plans to distribute potassium iodate tablets to civilians in affected areas to counter the effects of radioactivity. A stock of 10,000 tablets is held at the Clyde area monitoring headquarters at Rhu.

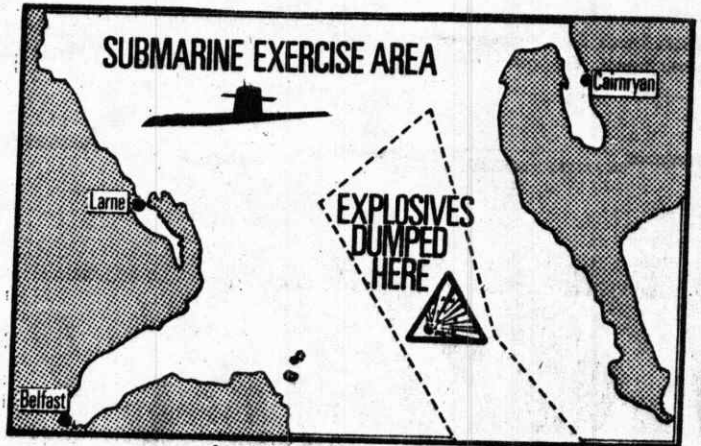
The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the environmental health directors from the six district councils in the Clyde area already maintain an up-to-date list of all farms and dairy operations within a six-mile radius of the Firth of Clyde, from the Cumbraes to the Tail of the Bank, Gareloch, Loch Long, Loch Goil, Loch Striven, Loch Fyne, Campbeltown, and Arran.

The worst scenario is that of a cloud of radioactive gas drifting in the wind from the scene of a submarine accident, polluting the ground and livestock.

The Navy estimates the chances of a serious submarine reactor fault resulting in contamination at one in many millions, but the plan contains no specific mention of the damage that might be caused by mines.

However, it concedes that: "In the event of a release of radioactivity from a nuclear-powered warship, evacuation of civilians and bans on the consumption of milk, free-range eggs, vegetables, and exposed foodstuffs may have to be enforced."

A Herald special investigation by IAN BRUCE and WILLIAM CLARK



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"Nuclear fears surface in Clyde."