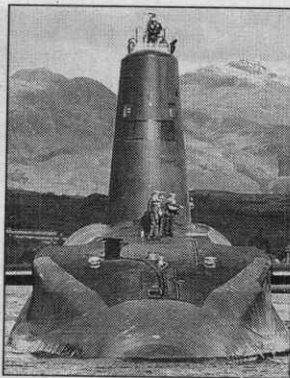


Nuclear subs linked to deaths from cancer

The Ministry of Defence has admitted that workers at nuclear dockyards could have contracted cancer due to breach of safety procedures. Kim Sengupta reports on how this can lead to massive compensation payments.

After working on the hulls of nuclear submarines, industrial radiographer Bill Neilson became the most irradiated man in Britain. Yet this was only discovered after he had suffered a slow and painful death.

A post-mortem examination revealed that he had received a cumulative dose of 15,000 millesieverts – the



Cancer victims had worked on nuclear submarines

biggest amount to enter a human body in this country. But this was somehow missed by the MoD's own checks. According to those, his record shows a lifetime dose of only 108 millesieverts, below the official lifetime ceiling of 180.

Tonight John Spellar, Under-Secretary of State for Defence, will tell BBC's *Panorama* programme that safety standards at the dockyards may have been breached in the past. He says: "... We

do accept that some individuals who worked in nuclear dockyards had levels of radiation that were high and have acquired cancers which could be possibly due to radiation ... I think in the main they [safety procedures] may have been adhered to. I think in the very early days that there might have been some breaches and therefore we have to acknowledge that."

His statement comes as the MoD faces legal action from former employees suffering from cancer who had worked on nuclear submarines. Some have died from illnesses their families believe were caused by the high dosage of radiation they received.

Mrs Neilson's wife, Jessie, wants to know why the official monitoring system so fatally failed her husband, and she has talked for the first about his horrific death.

She said: "He bled from the mouth, it was like a volcano erupting. He couldn't breathe properly because the blood was going down the throat and blocking his nose as well. He was doubly incontinent, and the poor man hated it because it had taken his dignity away. He was an 11-and-a-half stone man who was just four stones when he died. No questions have ever been answered Nobody has ever said 'I will make sure this doesn't happen again'."

David Hobbs, a former naval chief petty officer, is suing the MoD after developing spinal and testicular cancer. However, his records took 18 months to arrive after he requested them, and then many were found to have been lost.

Senior defence sources say the new Labour government is determined not to ignore the problem. More than £1m has been spent to put workers' health records on to a database, and a medical counselling service is being provided for former workers.