

NAVY SAFETY PLANS DON'T HOLD WATER

NUCLEAR submarines have been banned from Southampton because a major safety plan just does not hold water, say civic chiefs.

By Kate Thompson

into action in the event of a nuclear incident and includes distributing potassium iodate tablets to vulnerable people in the event of a nuclear leak.

Every time a nuclear craft docks in the port, thousands of the tablets, which stop the body absorbing radioactivity, have to be available to distribute in a 550-metre zone around the berth. The last Royal Navy submarine to visit was HMS Splendid in July last year.

Councillor Richard Williams said he had grave misgivings about the plan. "One of the distributors for the iodate tablets is a newsgent in the New Forest. No disrespect is meant to newsgents, but with something as significant as this I think we need to rethink who is involved," he said. At the city council's corporate committee,

The SotonSafe plan is designed to swing into action if there is a leak from a nuclear vessel visiting the Z berth at Southampton Docks. But councillors have so little confidence in the plan that they have told the Royal Navy to stay away until new safety procedures can be drawn up next year.

All political groups said they were happy to welcome the Royal Navy to the city - but there were real concerns over the fool-proof nature of the SotonSafe plan. The emergency plan is supposed to swing

councillors were told by Royal Navy top brass that the risk of a nuclear incident was about as likely as a plane falling out of the sky and crashing onto the city.

Commodore David Russell said the main reason for visiting the port was to raise the profile of the service and to allow the public - and potential recruits - to visit the craft.

He said he could conceive of no circumstances where a nuclear submarine would undergo repair work once it was in Southampton Docks.

"The risks, therefore, during any visit to the city are negligible," he said. The Z berth in Southampton Docks has been operational since 1977. Southampton declared itself a Nuclear Free Zone in 1984 but rescinded the decision some years ago.

Since then there have been six visits by nuclear subs. There were no plans by the Royal Navy to visit the port this year.

Southern Sunday Independent 6 May 2001