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Kursk could leak radiation 'within days'

A British nuclear expert who has studied the former communist submarine fleet says he expects the wreck of the Kursk to begin leaking radiation within days.

John Large, an independent nuclear consultant, said the water which flooded the submarine after she sank in the Barents Sea with the loss of 118 crew, has so far kept the nuclear reactor from overheating.

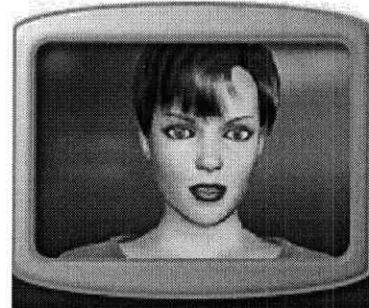
But he told Ananova he expects radiation to begin seeping from the ship very soon as a flooded reactor usually begins emitting radioactivity within 20 days of an accident. If that happens, contaminated fish could be landed ashore within weeks.

Mr Large said: "The Russians can't be allowed to deal with this. All nuclear navies will now try and protect the reputation of their subs but a navy does not design, build or repair boats it drives them and is not equipped to assess this risk.




"What this needs is an international commission to be given charge of the wreck site so it can do an immediate assessment and implement whatever measure needs to be put in place."

This is the first time a nuclear sub has sunk in shallow waters - any other radiation leaks have been confined to deep sea trenches which pose a minimum environmental threat.

Mr Large said he is alarmed that no one has yet sent a ship to



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Mr Large said he is alarmed that no one has yet sent a ship to the site of the wreck capable of pumping coolant into the reactor core.

He said: "I have seen no ship in the area capable of doing it. We need a ship in place to provide a constant cooling phase for the fuel and another system to then grab it.

"This is a major incident with potentially very serious environmental effects."

He said the Kursk tragedy had proved that navies have failed to prepare for this type of disaster and estimates the clean-up operation could cost US\$2 billion (£1.34 billion).

Last updated: 13:36 Monday 21st August 2000.

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