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Nuclear accident guides issued near base

COPIES OF a guide on what action should be taken in the event of a nuclear accident at Rosyth naval base will start dropping through the letter boxes of 2000 homes in Rosyth and Limehills next week.

Captain Peter Mansfield, the chief staff officer with responsibility for nuclear safety at Rosyth, stressed yesterday that this did not mean there was any increased risk of an accident.

The booklets and explanatory leaflets are simply being sent out to comply with new Government regulations which came into force at the end of last year following a European Council directive to member states.

Under the Public Information or Radiation Emergencies Regulations (PIRER), people

living near a nuclear site must be informed directly of emergency procedures.

In the case of Rosyth naval base, this means anyone living within two kilometres of the base has to be informed by June 30.

All this information has been available in public libraries under the contingency plan developed over the years, the Rosyth Public Safety Scheme, which provides full details of the measures required to protect the public in the event of a reactor accident.

Asked about the small radius in view of the range of the effects after the Chernobyl accident, Captain Mansfield said this was because the reactor in a submarine was so small by comparison. The only submarine undergoing

a major re-fit at Rosyth at present is the hunter-killer Sovereign, but Sophie was also in for a routine service which did not involve the reactor.

HMS Renown was the last Polaris submarine to have a re-fit at Rosyth and she left in November.

Captain Mansfield emphasised that the issuing of the booklet was not connected in any way with the expected announcement on the future of Rosyth as a nuclear re-fitting dockyard.

Similar leaflets are to be issued to about 30,000 households in the Devonport area.

The guide points out that the nuclear-powered submarines were designed and are operated to stringent safety standards and

have been operated at Rosyth without any form of nuclear accident for more than 30 years.

Under no circumstances could a nuclear submarine reactor generate an atomic bomb type explosion, and in the unlikely event of an accident involving a submarine's reactor, only people at very close range could be affected by gamma rays similar to X-rays.

This would have little effect beyond 500 to 600 yards of the submarine, designed to contain all radioactive material. If there was any escape of this material—mainly in the form of dust-like particles—X would only affect areas close to the submarine and those down-wind. The risk to members of the

public would be so low that pre-planned measures for public protection would only be justified if specific levels of radiation or radio-active contamination had been detected by specialist monitoring teams.

Specialist naval monitoring teams were on constant standby in the Rosyth area to check this whenever a submarine reactor was operating.

In the event of a nuclear emergency, an alarm would sound and residents in the two kilometre radius are advised simply to go indoors and stay there, closing all doors and windows to minimise the risk of possible airborne contamination entering the building. Fans should be switched off, ventilators closed and open fires

damped down or extinguished. No attempt should be made to collect children from school; their teachers and police would ensure they were looked after.

No-one should try to evacuate the area unless told to do so by the police as they could block roads for the emergency services.

If it was considered there was any risk of radioactive contamination, the Health Board might advise taking Iodine (Potassium Iodide) tablets to help the body reject radioactive iodine. These tablets are held locally and would be issued if required.

Chief Radiological Protection Officer Tom Laing said he did not expect counter-measures would be necessary outside the confines of the base.