

Observer
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Radiation go-ahead

THE ROYAL Navy is to allow independent radiation monitoring around HMS Dreadnought, the disused nuclear submarine at Rosyth dockyard, after pressure from the local council. It will be the first time that anyone but the navy has checked the levels of radioactivity in the yard's main basin, which also hosts the refitting of in-service submarines.

Dunfermline District Council has been pressing for more than a year to allow its radiation expert, Dr Robert Wheaton, into the main basin. Dr Wheaton already monitors sediment outside its gates, but has previously described his relationship with the navy as tense. He said he was pleased with the news and was waiting to hear how often he can take samples and when it will start.

The radionuclide he will be monitoring, particularly, is Cobalt-60, the isotope inherent in the Dreadnought in the largest quantity. It is mainly contained in the hull and reactor compartment.

Because the levels are unique to nuclear submarines, only now beginning to come out of service, the navy and Dr Wheaton have only general dose reference against which they can judge their readings. The navy monitors the basin once a year, but the council wants to do it more frequently.

The council will also receive the navy's annual readings in future as part of the MoD's new 'policy of openness' at the yard.

Earlier in the week, about 450 trades unionists at the yard voted 'overwhelmingly' to lift, temporarily, the blacking of Dreadnought after their employers, Babcock Thorn, asked them to complete an internal survey. They are still waiting for the results of a health physics check on the boat before they set foot on it when the survey starts tomorrow. Industrial unions' chairman at Rosyth, Tom Adamson, said: 'We are not against the de-commissioning of submarines. What we are against is the storing of submarines at Rosyth. We don't want it to become a nuclear graveyard.'

TONY SNAPE

Probe in Lothian nuclear alert

An urgent inquiry is to be made into the shipment of radioactive materials through Lothian.

The probe by emergency planning officers follows the delivery of a radioactive industrial waste tank through Edinburgh and Lothian to Rosyth Naval Base.

Lothian emergency planning committee will tomorrow ask for reports from their officials and from the Chief Constable and Firemaster.

Cargoes

Councillor Brian Fallon, committee chairman, said: "The Royal Navy already transport high-level nuclear waste from Rosyth to Sellafield through Edinburgh and in October British Rail will start taking consignments of waste from Torness power station across Lothian.

"We are responsible for co-ordinating resources to deal with any accident, yet we are not told when these cargoes are being moved across our doorstep."

The Navy stressed today that the waste tank was only "mildly radioactive" and said health physicists calculated that emission would equal one hospital X-ray

only after 160 hours' direct contact with the container.

An inquiry was under way at the naval base to discover why it had been sold as scrap, in 1983, and had to be recovered last week from a building site in Barking, Essex.

Councillor Fallon said: "This is a matter of great concern.

"I appreciate that the Royal Navy describe this as low-level radiation, but even low levels can affect the atmosphere.

"I am also concerned that this container was carried by road through Lothian and around Edinburgh, when it would have been safer to have taken it by rail."

Alert

Councillor Fallon said: "This again highlights the lack of legislation requiring Government departments and other agencies to notify emergency planning authorities when hazardous loads are being moved.

"It must become compulsory for the authorities to be alerted when equipment which could be dangerous is being carried through their area."

By TIM
BAIRSTOW

Edinburgh Evening News
29 Mar 89

Dockyard worker in radiation scare

A FITTER at Rosyth Royal Dockyard was "fully monitored" last week after an incident involving radioactive material.

His protective clothing was "slightly contaminated" by what was described by a dockyard spokesman as "a very small quantity" of radioactive material.

The material had been removed from the reactor of HMS Renown which is undergoing a refit and re-fuelling at the yard.

The dockyard management's statement said that the fitter had been carrying out a chemical decontamination process of the submarine's reactor.

The incident occurred while he had been involved in venting part of the decontamination equipment.

The spokesman added, "The contamination was confined to the man's clothing, but he was fully monitored as a precautionary measure and was shown to have been unaffected.

"Minor contamination within the chemical process plant has been cleaned up. No other dockyard personnel or member of the public was in any way affected."

25 Dec 87