

# 'Morning after' nuclear pill row

by RICHARD LONGFORD

PILLS to combat radiation sickness should be handed out BEFORE a nuclear accident - not AFTER, Plymouth councillors say.

The councillors questioned the policy of the South and West Devon Health Authority to give tablets in advance only to residents within 550 metres of Devonport dockyard and naval base.

Residents beyond 550 metres, but within two kilometres of the nuclear submarine base, would not get automatic distribution, but could apply for pills if they wished.

Members of the council's environmental services committee took a different view.

They asked why, if the Royal Navy was willing to make up to 200 sailors available to distribute tablets AFTER an accident, they couldn't do it now.

They argued that the MoD would have enough on its hands after a nuclear accident.

The potassium iodate tablets, which protect against the effects of radioactive iodine, have been given to residents in

## Why wait for worst before taking action?

Torpoint, which comes under a different health authority.

Seventeen Plymouth schools have also been issued with tablets.

Peter Smith, the council's emergency planner, argued that if the Navy was willing in principle to make the tablets available "why on earth can't they be made available in a time of relative tranquillity?"

### Chaos

As George Wheeler (Lab, Sutton) pointed out, after an accident there could be chaos. It would be far kinder to Royal Navy personnel for tablets to be distributed now, he said.

Mike Sheaff (Lab, Keyham), who lives a few hun-

dred yards from the base, dismissed arguments residents might lose or misuse the tablets. Most householders were responsible enough, he said.

And David Palmer (Lab, Trelawny) said it was a disgrace that after 20 years there was still a lack of basic planning.

He said: "It should be addressed now by the pre-distribution of tablets as soon as possible."

Dr Sarah Harrison, consultant public health physician for South and West Devon Health Authority, disagreed.

She said plans were needed to distribute tablets on the day of an accident.

Evidence from two other UK locations where tablets had been handed out showed that only 70 to 80 per cent of households could find them at any given time.

Ken Tucker, chairman of governors of Barne Barton Primary School, is a long-standing advocate of giving out pills in advance.

He said the city council should be congratulated for its stance.

He said it was the health authority that was responsible for a continued lack of action.