

Greenpeace fears for refit force

GREENPEACE has called for Britain's ageing Polaris nuclear submarines to be taken out of service because of serious reactor problems.

The environmental group claims the veteran missile boats pose a threat to their crews and refit workers at Rosyth Royal Dockyard.

In November last year, the *Press* reported that cracks within the primary cooling circuits of Valiant / Churchill class submarines had led to their early retirement.

In a new report, Greenpeace say that similar problems in the identical reactors of the Polaris boats make their operational safety questionable.

And they say the struggle to put things right aboard HMS Renown means she is still in Rosyth — 20 months after she should have returned to North Atlantic patrol.

"As present techniques currently stand, workers at the Royal Dockyards at Rosyth and Devonport, employed to carry out this work, will receive high doses of radiation," says the report.

"The nose-to-tail programme at Rosyth means that HMS Revenge cannot enter refit until Renown comes out. Revenge is well-overdue her intended third refit. She has now been in service since her second refit for a record-breaking eight-and-a-half years," say Greenpeace.

The Ministry of Defence had previously confirmed that Renown was undergoing "extra work" at Rosyth but refused to discuss with the *Press* what form that work was taking.

Work on decommissioning Churchill, a hunter / killer submarine, is also under way at Rosyth.

The submarine's fin, or conning-

tower, has been removed and this came as a surprise to an experienced ex-Navy man.

He suggested the removal was to make the hulk less conspicuous and less embarrassing.

"Under a tarpaulin, without a fin, a submarine could pass for anything — even a barge," he said.

A spokesman for the dockyard's commercial management said there was no secret about the removal of the fin in March and no sinister purpose behind the removal.

It had been cut-off to reduce the weight of the hulk and to increase stability. "It's part of the decommissioning procedure," he said, adding that the fin had been placed on the dock bottom before being disposed off.

Dreadnought, decommissioned in 1982, is also at Rosyth, although its fin is intact.

A spokesman for the United States Navy said fin removal was part of their decommissioning procedure as a prelude to the submarines "being turned into razor blades."

Dockyard trade unions chairman Brian Negus said that there were hazards for workers at the dockyard.

But he added that as much as possible was done to minimise the risks posed by dangerous chemicals, asbestos and radiation.

"We have, over the last few years, halved the maximum radiation dose for workers," he said.

Procedures were in place to avoid workers coming close to the maximum and he praised the yard management's attitude towards safety.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace says the Polaris boats should join the growing number of decommissioned hulks.

"Greenpeace considers that the risk of accident and the health of dockyard workers arising from the continued operation of Polaris to be unacceptable."

Nuclear Free Seas campaigner Janet Convery told the *Press*, "Repairing the defects is a highly-skilled job involving putting workers into the reactor area."

In an attempt to move the work forward quickly, those technicians would be asked to work to the maximum possible