

Cover-up raises fears for sub crews

Paul Brown

EVIDENCE that the United States Government falsified documents to cover up an accident aboard one of its nuclear submarines has heightened fears that crews may be suffering unrecorded after-effects of their service.

Health checks are now being carried out in both Britain and the US on servicemen who have crewed nuclear submarines.

The US cover-up was exposed yesterday in Washington, where the liberal think-tank the Institute of Policy Studies and Greenpeace jointly released papers showing that in 1973 there was a primary coolant leak on the nuclear-powered USS *Guardfish* in the Pacific.

The incident — which led to four crewmen being hospitalised for radiation monitoring — was never recorded in the submarine's log, and on May 9 this year, the Pentagon said such a leak never happened.

However an official US Navy document recording the details has now been traced, and officers in charge at the time have confirmed the incident, after which the submarine surfaced and was decontaminated. Its reactor was then repaired and it resumed its patrol.

Although there is no suggestion of undisclosed accidents in

Britain, the Ministry of Defence has announced it is to carry out a study of all British submariners to check for an excess of cancers or other radiation illnesses as a result of their service in nuclear submarines.

Until now, the ministry has assumed that crewmen have not suffered ill effects, and has never checked. However, an American survey, which the US military long resisted publishing, has shown an excess of cancers among crewmen.

Official MoD figures on radiation exposure of British sailors show that only once in 10 years has a submariner received a dose of more than 50 milliSieverts — the maximum legal limit in a single year.

However, the National Radiological Protection Board recommended two years ago that, in view of data illustrating the dangers of lower doses of radiation, the legal limit should be reduced from 50 mSv in any one year to 15.

The Government has not given legal backing to this recommendation — mainly because the nuclear industry is unable to meet these standards, but many sailors have received doses well above the new suggested limit.

However, the Royal Navy has made extensive efforts to reduce the exposure of crew, and very few now exceed the 15 mSv level.