

Hel. Ad. 27 Nov 97



YOU

Purpose of short sermon

Madam,

REGARDING the letters in last week's Advertiser criticising the validity of Exercise short Sermon 97, I would like to point out that Government policy requires operators of nuclear facilities to have an emergency plan in the extremely unlikely event that an accident involving a radioactive release occurs.

Clearly there is little point in such a plan if not tested by way of exercise.

Short Sermon 97 was the boldest and most far-reaching exercise of its type ever conducted and broke new ground in being continuous for three days, and successfully tested base evacuation as well as the procedures for civilian evacuation with Strathclyde Police and post-accident remediation measures with Argyll and Bute Council.

The exercise was as realistic as it could be without involving public evacuation, which would have caused disruption which could not be justified when set against the limited value of proving that evacuation could take place.

It should also be noted that if such an accident occurred for real, public evacuation may not be appropriate and if it were, might only be required out to 2km in the downwind sector.

the comment about planning for a year is also unfair - players and no inkling of the direction in which the unfolding events within the exercise were going. (I was a player and can personally assure readers of the stress participants faced in dealing with the real-time issues involved.)

Using a large number of media undergraduates from far and wide created one of the most realistic elements.

Far from 'clamming up', the RN and other bodies issued 30 press releases (the first within minutes of being alerted) and held about a dozen press conferences and briefings to keep the "media" as fully informed as possible.

the "press pack" did not pussy-foot with the authorities, but hungrily demanded, at times to the point of aggression, information to meet their deadlines.

There was therefore no news blackout within the

exercise and the Base held a real press conference at the Clyde Off-Site Centre before it began.

Essentially, we must not forget that the reason for the exercise, one of about 12 conducted each year throughout Scotland and Northern England, is public safety.

In 35 years of continuous reactor operations there has never been an accident involving a release of radioactivity and we aim to maintain that standard in the future.

Independent authorities observed the exercise and concluded that the MOD's plans were extremely robust and held public safety factors paramount throughout.

Yours etc., S.J. Willmot, Public Relations Office, HM Naval Base Clyde, Faslane, Helensburgh, G84 8HL.

Ignoring wider issues

WELL, a year in planning and Exercise Short Sermon has gone in a flash (literally).

The MoD hailed the exercise a success and I guess from their point of view it was. Not only did they deal with a theoretical accident on board HMS Sovereign, but they achieved an almost total news blackout of how they did it.

Basically during the exercise the MoD had a submarine with a serious fire which led to the reactor going out of control.

Eventually a hole developed in the hull of the vessel from which radiation began leaking out.

Having failed to plug the hole, using a helicopter to drop water balloons, their final solution was to sink the submarine within the base, using a warship to fire high velocity shells into it.

To end the exercise at this point and claim it is a success is to ignore the wider issues.

This is only the start of our problems. Here we would have a submarine at the bottom of the Gareloch spewing out radioactive material.

Not only are you contaminating the Gareloch and surrounding area, but being tidal, the Clyde and beyond then becomes radioactive.

Having just spent around £10b on the Trident base you would not be able to use it again.

HMS Victorious will have to remain at 12 berth for evermore, HMS Vigilant having returned from America would not be able to enter the base and HMS Vanguard would have to go elsewhere after its patrol.

A cynic would think that the reason for the news black out is clear. Exercise Short Sermon has shown that at the end of the day a serious accident would inevitably lead to a disaster.

Yours etc., Name and Address supplied.

Madam,

THE planned eviction of Faslane Peace Camp at Shandon, Helensburgh is an outrage.

Argyll and Bute Council are intending to waste a huge amount of taxpayers money on forcibly removing men, women and children from their homes in mid-winter.

The residents of Argyll and Bute have not been consulted about the eviction, nor have they been told about the cuts to council services because of it.

The Peace Camp performs an important function monitoring the movement of potentially lethal nuclear warheads and submarines and maintain a memorial garden to all those who have suffered as a result of the nuclear industry and of nuclear weaponry.

In fact, nuclear weapons were found to

Peace campers are upholding the law

be generally illegal by the International Court of Justice on July 8 1996, so ironically Faslane Peace Camp is trying to uphold the law.

What is this country coming to when we can no longer peacefully protest against one of the most serious threats to life that our civilization has ever faced. Yours etc., Sally Moorcroft, 12 Leopold Road, Clarendon Park, Leicester, LE2 1YB.

Send your letters to:

The editor, Helensburgh Advertiser, 15 Colquhoun Street, Helensburgh.

Handwritten initials and numbers: 33207, HJG