

Asked if the Secretary of State intends to make amendments to the Clyde Public Safety scheme in order to make provisions in the event of any radioactive leak arising from accidents to nuclear submarines in the River Clyde or nearby waters, he said that the Scheme already made provision for such an accident.

Asked whether any civilian or naval personnel have been contaminated with radiation at Clyde Submarine Base in the course of January, he replied "No."

Asked what detailed information is available to the Clyde Local Liaison Committee on the consequences of an accident involving a nuclear reactor on a nuclear-powered submarine base at Faslane he said the possible consequences were outlined in the Clyde Public Safety Scheme.

Asked whether any of Her Majesty's submarines departed from the Clyde Submarine Base at a time later than her scheduled departure date during January, he stated that it was not MoD policy to comment on matters affecting the operation or operational movements of Her Majesty's submarines.

The same reply was given to the question whether any of the reactor cladding was damaged on HMS Resolution during 1988.

Asked what arrangements exist for the disposal of nuclear material arising from an accident to a nuclear submarine in or around the Clyde Submarine Base, he said it was not their policy to discuss arrangements for disposing of nuclear material arising from such an accident, but there were a range of options.

In answer to the question what arrangements exist for the evacuation of the population both in and beyond the area covered by the Clyde Local Liaison Committee, he said that evacuation of the civilian population in the unlikely event of a nuclear reactor accident is addressed in Clydepubsafe, that there was little likelihood of evacuation being required beyond this area, but that the scheme provides the framework on which the response to an accident with more widespread effects would be based.

None of these answers so far has been satisfactory, but this is most misleading. CLYDEPUBSAFE allows for the decision to be made to evacuate civilians within 36 hours, and lays the onus on the local District Council Chief Executive to organise this. Obviously such a large-scale evacuation has never been attempted in exercises. In 1986 the MoD held an exercise codenamed "Short Sermon" which involved the evacuation of base personnel to the nearby Greenfield Army Camp, and the deployment of a team from Rhu Radiation Monitoring Centre.

Clydepubsafe allows for the early evacuation of civilians within 550 metres of the submarine, and issuing them with Potassium Iodide tablets to ward off the effects of radioactive iodine in the air (no mention is made of any other pollutants). Conveniently, this

550-metre zone is highly unlikely to extend beyond the base. In the doubt and confusion which would follow a real accident it seems unreasonable to leave local people waiting for up to 36 hours after witnessing the exodus of the base personnel before telling them whether it's safe to stay put or not!

Mr McFall also asked where in Scotland the Nuclear Emergency Monitoring Organisation is based, and whether it was on active deployment during January, and if George Younger would make a statement, to which the reply was that NEMO(Scotland) is based at Faslane, and that it had not been deployed during 1988.

Unfortunately, following the incident, Faslane Peace Camp had observed an unusual convoy entering the base. It consisted of MoD vehicles displaying a white diamond symbol on the sides, and included at least one vehicle from the NEMO unit based at Rhu - the distinctive blue and white landrovers of this unit have been observed many times, and carry monitoring equipment clearly visible in the rear. The other vehicles are likely to belong to the Nuclear Accident Response Organisation, whose existence was revealed by The Independent last year.

Apparently nobody had bothered to tell the Commodore Clyde of all this activity - which is a shame as he is at the top of Clydepubsafe's command chain, and would have to instigate any reports to the press or other responses. Dumbarton District Council's Chief Executive was also not informed. Mr Patrick Palmer, Faslane's Public Relations Officer claims this shows how minor the incident really was, and has also said that repeated allegations that a seaman was contaminated are "scaremongering". Perhaps you are satisfied with his assurances. If not, and if you think there should be more openness about these matters, you might like to ring him on 0436-4321. His attitude is perhaps understandable; compared to the MoD's apparent blase response to these matters of public safety, even the most responsible concern must seem like scaremongering.

50 people, including members of Helensburgh CND and Faslane Peace Camp, demonstrate at Faslane on the day the story broke.

