



Mersey docks in nuclear sub plan

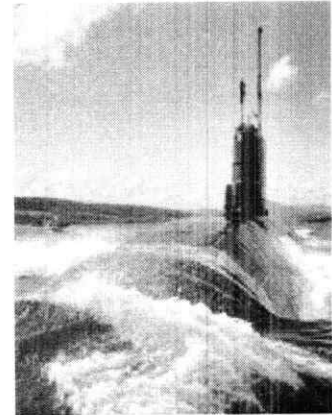
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EXCLUSIVE by Rob Merrick, Daily Post

SCHOOLS and homes would be issued with cancer-fighting emergency tablets under shock plans to bring nuclear submarines back to Merseyside, the Daily Post can reveal.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is in talks with local authority leaders about reopening a mothballed "Z-berth" at the Port of Liverpool at Seaforth, to allow the hunter-killers to dock for supplies and to change crews.

Under the plans, schools and homes near the port would stockpile potassium iodide tablets ahead of a visit to lessen the effects of exposure to radiation if there was an accident.



The move was immediately condemned by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities group, which compared it to "putting a nuclear reactor in the middle of a town".

Stewart Kemp, the group's secretary, said: "One of the riskiest times for a nuclear reactor is when it is powering up and powering down, which is what happens when a submarine comes into port.

"This raises the same issues as that of a community living next to a nuclear power station and it is not for nothing that these are in remote areas." But last night the Royal Navy played down the significance of the plans to issue tablets in the local area.

A Navy spokesman said: "Only in the extremely unlikely event of a nuclear incident would the Health Protection Agency advise the tablets to be taken.

"In the 40 years of operating nuclear submarines there has never been a reactor accident."

Britain's fleet of 10 hunter-killer nuclear-powered submarines docked occasionally at Liverpool until the late 1990s, when new laws transferred responsibility for emergency plans to local authorities.

But defence chiefs are now worried that too much strain is being placed on its main berths, at Plymouth, Barrow-in-Furness and Faslane, on the Clyde.

As a result, it is asking Sefton council - within whose boundaries the Z-berth falls - whether its radiation regulations have been fully developed and tested.

Liverpool council is among the 70 English members of Nuclear Free Local Authorities, but neighbouring Sefton is not.

MoD police would provide security and the emergency services would be on standby.

The Royal Navy spokesman said it was not the intention to dock any of Britain's four Trident submarines, which are armed with nuclear warheads, at Liverpool.

He added: "The ability to operate our submarines flexibly around the entire coastline is a key

contribution to the defence of the United Kingdom.

"And visits by warships, including nuclear-powered submarines, gives the public the chance to see and understand better the contribution the Navy makes."

The potassium iodide pills, which would be issued to schools and residents near the base, are used to prevent thyroid cancer in people exposed to radioactive iodides.

The plan to use the Port of Liverpool was revealed in a written parliamentary answer after the issue of Z-berths was raised by a Conservative defence spokesman.

Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces Minister, told MPs: "Preliminary discussions have been held with Sefton metropolitan borough council, in Liverpool."

In addition to Liverpool, discussions are under way to bring the Z-berths at both Southampton and Portland, in Dorset, back into use.

A Sefton council spokesman said the authority had met with the Ministry of Defence.

But he added: "Nothing official was proposed and we have not

been in any further discussions with the MoD since."

The spokesman said it was likely that a public consultation would be held before any decision was made to reopen the Z-berth.

It's a huge risk, say politicians >>>

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POLITICIANS and anti-nuclear campaigners last night warned vessels using the Port of Liverpool could prove a huge risk to the local community.

Among the nearby schools which could be issued with anti-radiation tablets are St Joan of Arc Roman Catholic Primary and Gladstone CE Primary, located near the docks.

Sefton Lib-Dem Cllr Jack Colbert, who lives in Seaforth, said: "If they have got to hand out these radiation tablets to children, then they shouldn't be bringing nuclear submarines here at all.

"If nuclear submarines are so safe, why would they be bringing in these measures?"

Cllr Colbert, who is also a member of Merseyside Fire Authority, added: "I remember the last time with the fire, and there was pandemonium here.

"You have got to think about all the residents in the area, not just the children. There would have to be contingency plans put in place to make sure emergency services could get here quickly.

"Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service would not know how to deal with an emergency like that. There would have to be extra training."

Janet Laycock, treasurer of Merseyside CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) said an accident could result in fallout escaping from the crafts' nuclear-powered engines.

The fallout could be passed to different parts of the region, depending on weather conditions,

causing radiation sickness and cancer.

Mrs Laycock added: "If this goes ahead, we would definitely be campaigning against it.

"It could become very serious indeed.

"This country is still affected by what happened in Chernobyl 20 years ago."

Lib-Dem Cllr Maureen Fearn, Sefton's spokeswoman for children's services, said she would "welcome" nuclear submarines back at the docks.

One of the worst results of the Chernobyl disaster is that large numbers of children in Belarus and the Ukraine have developed thyroid cancer.

It is believed that these could have been prevented if the children had been issued with pills within one or two hours of the accident.

The day a visit by a nuclear submarine almost turned into a disaster >>>

The day a visit by a nuclear submarine almost turned into a disaster

THIRTY years ago a nuclear submarine, HMS Warspite, sailed up the River Mersey to take part in the annual Battle of Atlantic celebrations.

But it soon turned into a near-disaster when fire broke out close to the vessel's nuclear reactor, torpedo store and ten tons of diesel oil.

As the flames spread, emergency teams managed to rescue more than 100 visitors, many of them children, who had been on a sightseeing tour of HMS Warspite.

Although no nuclear alert was declared and the ship's captain insisted there was no threat as the reactor had been turned off at the time, it sparked safety fears across the region.

Investigations carried out by anti-nuclear campaigners after the May 3 incident in 1976 claimed there had been a number of collisions in the Irish Sea between trawlers and submarines.

And fishermen backed their concerns and claimed there was a real threat of a major accident.

Campaigners called for the Royal Navy to supply them with the emergency plans drawn up to cope with a major disaster.

They refused to give out details on grounds of national security but told how the city was covered with a special

safety scheme prepared in consultation with local councils and emergency services.

It also emerged a 550-metre exclusion zone around any ship would automatically be evacuated and potassium iodide tablets would be handed out to anyone in the affected areas.


The crisis plans included setting up an accident headquarters at Bootle Town Hall and monitoring local farmland for radiation contamination.

The Warspite took more than 20 months to repair and the fire was blamed on a burst fuel pipe.

Six members of the crew were given bravery awards for their gallantry in fighting the blaze.

But the hunter-killer submarine made return trips to the River Mersey, even opening to the public once again in 1986.

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