

# Polaris boat 'unfit' to sail

**THE Ministry of Defence has refused to comment on claims that one of the Royal Navy's four Polaris submarines based at Faslane has been refused an operations certificate because of crippling reactor defects.**

If the claims are correct, it means that for the first time a Polaris boat has been declared UNFIT to put to sea.

The claims, which relate to HMS Repulse, were made in a national newspaper at the weekend and backed by the environmental organisation Greenpeace.

An MoD spokesman said they never comment on the operation of individual boats.

## CONCERN

The claims have already fuelled growing concern that political pressure to keep one boat at sea at all times will come into increasing conflict with safety considerations.

Of the four Polaris boats, only two now appear to be in operation. Renown has been laid up at Rosyth for over two years and Resolute has been at sea for three months. Revenge has been undergoing repair at Faslane, and Greenpeace

By MARY CULLEN

say it is EIGHT YEARS since the boat had a major refit — the longest period between refits of all the Polaris subs.

Now it appears that work on reactor faults in the submarines has meant some workers being exposed to increased doses of radiation.

The MoD denied this week that 50 workers at the Faslane submarine base have been exposed to levels of radiation in excess of national guidelines while they were working on defective Polaris submarines.

Figures released last week by Junior Defence Minister Kenneth Cairns show that the workers were exposed to more than 15 millisieverts a year — the limit recommended by the government's National Radiological Protection Board.

One worker received between 30 and 40 mSv, 28 workers between 20 and 30; and 21 between 15 and 20.

An MoD spokesman pointed out that the levels were well within the 50 mSv level set by the International Radiological Protection Board, which is the legal limit in Britain.

But he admitted that the MoD would not allow

any workers to be exposed to limits above 20 mSv today.

*He said: "The international community accepts that a 50 mSv limit is appropriate. As good managers concerned for our workforce we have voluntarily decided to work to a lower limit of 30 mSv, and have now reduced that to no more than 100 mSv over five years."*

"Any exposure to radiation can't be good. But our stance has always been that the levels to which workers are exposed are as low as reasonably practicable."

## SENSITIVE

Workers in sensitive areas at Faslane carry dosimeters, which measure the levels of radiation to which they are exposed. Once a meter registers 15 mSv, the worker is taken out of the area and the radiation level is investigated.

The spokesman refused to comment on claims that the higher than usual levels of radiation came about because of an intensive inspection and maintenance programme being undertaken on the Polaris fleet at Faslane.

He said this "might well be the case" and confirmed that a programme of inspection "over and above the normal" was being carried out

# Part-time deterrent jibe by unions

**UNION officials at Faslane claim the MoD is operating a five day a week deterrent.**

They say swingeing budget cuts have drastically reduced the submarine base's effectiveness and claim that the MoD is prepared to limit the movement of submarines to the future of the base, raising doubts about the future of the base.

The claims come as the first year of the MoD's new management strategy begins to bite. As of April, the submarine base at Faslane and the Royal Naval Armaments Depot at Coullport have no centrally controlled budget. Instead, individual departments have their own budget within which they must work.

An MoD spokesman denied that the sums allocated this year represented a cut on last year's spending level.

But the results of the new system, according to a campaign committee set up by unions at the base, are possible job losses, cuts in overtime, and reduced operational effectiveness.

The campaign committee said: "One department

since defects were found in the reactors of nuclear powered submarines last year.

Five submarines in the Vailany/Churchill class, which have the same nuclear reactor as the Polaris boats, were withdrawn after defects were discovered in their reactor cooling systems.

Dumbarton MP John McFall, who has campaigned vigorously on the issue of lowering radiation levels to which workers are exposed, said: "The figures released this week by Mr Cairns were given to another MP. I have just seen them and will be writing to the minister seeking further explanation for the figures and assurances that annual radiation doses will be kept to the level of 100 mSv over five years which was announced by the MoD in January.

"I will be pushing the minister to keep levels well below 20 mSv a year."

● GREENPEACE REPORT — See Centre Pages.

deterioration in service at Faslane and Coullport arising from the new budget procedures. And there is no question of a five day a week deterrent.

"Departments must work within their budgets and there could be cuts in overtime and take home pay.

"The tug fleet will work as required within the new budget — but there will be no overtime for the sake of overtime."

He said the trades unions were kept informed about the cash situation and there are ongoing consultations with them. He added: "The deterrent will continue to operate 365 days a year."

Dumbarton MP John McFall said he was due to hold a meeting with the unions involved and would represent their views to the MoD.

The campaign committee represents the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists; the Civil and Public Servants Association; and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants.

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