

Lennox
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Silence over sub faults story

THE MINISTRY of Defence refused to comment this week on allegations that a fourth Polaris submarine based at Faslane has been found to have the same crippling reactor fault that is widely believed to affect the other three.

If the reports are true, the situation will cause major problems for defence chiefs.

The first of the Trident submarines commissioned to replace the ageing Polaris fleet, Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, is not due to arrive in the Clyde until the mid 1990s.

And efforts to keep the crippled Polaris boats afloat have already run into trouble.

A senior trades unionist warned last week that unless safe radiation exposure levels are agreed for the welders and engineers working on the cracked reactors, the refitting and mending of Polaris boats at Faslane could grind to a halt.

Talks are currently being held between the Ministry of Defence and Trades Union representatives about the radiation levels to which workers are exposed.

Jack Dromey of the Transport and General Workers' Union said that unless safe exposure levels are agreed and safety concerns answered, work on refitting and mending faulty reactors could stop.

The decision by Defence Minister Kenneth Carlisle to hold talks about the situation follows mounting pressure from MPs, including Dumbarton MP John McFall.

They have repeatedly asked the government to respond to allegations that Polaris submarines are crippled by reactor cracks.

Mr McFall told the House of Commons last month that it is "general talk" that only one submarine is ready and on patrol at all times.

BOATS

That is HMS Resolution, the oldest of the boats, which is now believed to have a reactor fault.

Mr McFall said: "It does the Minister for Defence no justice to hide information from the select defence committee or the general public."

"Jack Dromey, the national secretary of the T&G and Paul Noon of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists say they will not allow their workers' health to be jeopardised by letting them face excessive radiation doses to get Polaris submarines back to sea."

A report from the Defence Select Committee, of which Mr McFall is a member, pointed out that recent increases in radiation levels at Faslane went against the general downward trend elsewhere.

Official figures released in May revealed that 50 workers at Faslane last year received radiation doses well in excess of new levels set by the Radiological Protection Board of 15 msv.

But an MoD spokesperson pointed out that the doses were still well within the legal limit of 50 msv.

Mr Dromey, who chairs the defence unions joint committee, said they had asked for urgent discussions on the problems with Polaris and what is involved in putting them right.

An MoD spokesperson confirmed that meetings were going ahead and said "every aspect of nuclear safety" would be up for discussion.