



Health & Safety Executive
Nuclear Safety Directorate

Mr K Owen
Chairman of DIG
Plymouth Nuclear Dump Information Group
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23 December 1997

Dear Mr Owens

Thank you for your letter of 28 November 1997 which has been passed to me for reply. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding, which has been caused by a number of factors.

I am sure you realise that the Faslane exercise was based on a scenario with an extremely small probability. A serious accident was assumed to be in progress and that radioactive material was being released. In those circumstances it is the duty of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to devise a way to control and terminate the accident to reduce the harm caused. In doing so it had to take account of the various routes by which harm might be caused, for instance by release of radioactive material into the air or into sea water; it had also to take account, as you imply, of the harm that might occur during the long-term clean up that would follow the accident.

A number of solutions were considered. The eventual decision to sink the submarine was taken to reduce the amount of airborne radioactive material released from it, and so reduce the radiation doses to the public. The Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) has no reason to believe that decision was not the best decision in the circumstances of the exercise. If the effect of sinking a submarine is to reduce the overall harm to members of the public then we should expect MOD to consider it.

The correct response to any particular accident is to some extent specific to its location, and there are a number of important differences between Faslane and Devonport. We can confirm, however, that the option of sinking a submarine at Devonport to reduce the harm following a serious accident is one which we are content for MOD to keep open.

As to the method of sinking, we should expect MOD to employ whichever method reduces the overall harm. (The Faslane exercise used small calibre gunfire to puncture the thin external ballast tanks.)

Head of Division: Mr C R Willby, HM Deputy Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations
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Lastly, though several of its inspectors were present as observers, the NII had no formal role in the recent emergency exercise at Faslane, as it was an MOD exercise. The NII was therefore not consulted on the choice of measures to mitigate the effects of the accident.

Yours sincerely

John E. Hicks

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