

PLYMOUTH.

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Nuclear pills plan unveiled

SHOULD READ 30K HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN 2KM

BY PATRICK BARRIE

THE first plan has been devised to hand out radiation sickness tablets to thousands of Plymouth people to counter the effects of a nuclear disaster at Devonport dockyard.

The plan will be tested in a dummy run next month. For more than 20 years health and military chiefs have struggled to devise a plan in case of an accident on one of the seven Devonport-based nuclear powered Trafalgar submarines.

Some 30,000 people living within 550 metres of the dockyard are at most risk of radiation poisoning.

Previous suggestions to give the potassium iodate tablets, which counter the danger of thyroid cancer, included supplying the drugs from helicopters or from ambulances, but were rejected as unworkable.

But now the Royal Navy and South West Devon Health Authority have developed detailed plans to limit the

house to house distribution to a smaller area, based on estimates of where a radiation cloud would travel.

Under the scheme, once an impending nuclear accident was identified wind speed and direction will be used to calculate the cloud's path.

Fifty sailors would deliver tablets for up to 12,000 people within one hour around the cloud's path.

Peter Hurford, Captain of Base Safety at Devonport, said until now there had been no firm plans to deal with distribution.

He explained the potential level of radiation poisoning was far less than at a nuclear power plant because submarine reactors are 30 times smaller.

City councillors and residents have long called for the tablets to be handed out prior to an incident, but this has been ruled out by health bosses.

Kevin Owen, chairman of Plymouth

Nuclear Dump Information Group, said the new scheme was flawed but a step in the right direction.

He said: "It is hopeless and we just hope the scheme is in its infancy and there will be dialogue so it can be developed and they listen to the concerns of local people."

"Predistribution is carried out in France and in Switzerland without any trouble or worries, so why not here?"

Ken Tucker, chairman of governors of Barne Barton Primary School criticised the plan.

"This has been like a Whitehall farce. They have a lot of theories but do not have any practical experience. There is no way 60 men working in a strange area, say at night in pitch black, could cover that sort of area in the time they have set themselves."

Mr Tucker added: "If they are willing to drop the tablets through people's doors without asking any questions in an emergency, why can't they do it beforehand?"

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