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MoD admits 40 leaks of radiation into Forth and Clyde

By Rob Edwards

RADIATION has accidentally leaked into the Firth of the Clyde and the Forth from military nuclear bases 40 times over the past 18 years, the government has revealed.

Most of the leaks have come from the Trident submarine base at Faslane on Gare Loch. According to the Ministry of Defence, there have been 33 occasions since 1980 when radioactive liquids have been "unintentionally released" from the base into the loch.

Over the same period there have been seven spillages of radioactivity from the Rosyth naval dockyard in Fife. Most of the leakages came from old tanks of radioactive cooling water for submarine reactors known as Primary Effluent Tanks or PETs.

Environmental group Friends of the Earth Scotland yesterday reacted angrily to the MoD's admissions.

"These figures give the lie to the idea that the handling of radiation has been done in a fail-safe fashion," said the group's director, Kevin Dunion.

"It is the current impact of these insidious increases to background radiation that gives rise to concern. No level of radiation is safe."

The biggest leaks from Faslane were in 1987, when seven spillages released almost a cubic metre of liquid radioactive waste. There were six leaks in 1986, four in 1988 and four in 1992.

At Rosyth there was almost one incident a year from 1986 to 1993, the biggest in 1989 leaking nearly half a cubic metre. The figures were given by the defence minister, John Spellar, in an answer to the English Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes, Norman Baker. Spellar also disclosed that there had been 10 leaks of radiation from the Devonport naval dockyard on the south coast of England since 1980.

Spellar argued that the pollution caused by all the leakages was very small. "The radiological impact on the environment is assessed to be insignificant," he said. The leaky old PETs had been replaced by tanks with an improved design, he maintained.

"It is gratifying that the MoD is at last giving us a glimpse of the worrying problems there have been at Faslane and Rosyth," said Dr David Lowry, an environmental consultant.

"What concerns me is what other radioactive releases may have happened which have not yet been admitted," he added.