

Nuclear link to defects denied

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Allegations that radioactive leaks at a nuclear submarine base may have caused deformities in babies in the Holy Loch area were rejected by health board officials yesterday, but Mr John Mackay, Scottish Office Minister for Health, is to ask for a full report on the claims.

The claims in a Sunday newspaper said that three babies born within the last three months each had limb deformities, and that as only 47 babies had been born in the area since December, three malformed children was many times above the average.

The allegations linked these deformities with radiation leaks from American nuclear submarines at the Holy Loch.

A spokesman for Argyll and Clyde Health Board denied the claims and said there was no evidence to give any indication that radiation levels were abnormally high in the Clyde estuary and its inlets. "After making inquiries we have found that there is no particular concern being expressed in any of our hospitals about an undue series of deformities of births," he said.

These allegations were the latest in a long line of stories which, to the board's mind, were "only stories." People making these claims would have to come up with facts to substantiate them, he said, and before anybody could make any intelligent comments they would have to have proof. "If we were concerned at levels of radiation then we would obviously do something about it," he said.

Mr Mackay, MP for Argyll, said he would make no comment on the allegations until he had the chance to check them.

Mrs Dinky McFarlane, secretary of Dunoon Community Council, said the authorities had assured her council that there was regular monitoring of radiation levels by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

They had been given a set of figures which showed that radiation in the Clyde area was not too high and that most of the radiation came from Sellafield nuclear waste processing plant in Cumbria.

"Radiation from Hunterston and the Holy Loch did not give much cause for concern at all," she said, "in fact, it was not near the danger level." Mrs McFarlane said the claims would be discussed at the next meeting of the community council.

Dr J. A. Raeburn, of the human genetics unit at Edinburgh's Western General Hospital, said he would be surprised if the three children were born deformed because of radioactivity, and did not know of any evidence that radiation was connected with children being born with limb abnormalities.

m 'minor' accident

1/7/85

By Jean Stead,

Scottish Correspondent

A slight crash involving two lorries in a nuclear warhead convoy near the Clyde submarine base at Faslane, Strathclyde, has led to complaints to the Scottish Secretary and the Defence Secretary.

The crash was minor, with a vehicle bumping into one in front. It caused a broken windscreen and traffic delays, but police moved pedestrians away from the scene (telling them there was danger of radioactive contamination). The accident happened on June 20.

A letter calling for a public inquiry into the incident has been sent by the acting provost of the Dumbarton district council, Mr Ian Leitch, to Mr George Younger and Mr Michael Heseltine. He said the inquiry should be held urgently because of the possible consequences of a crash of this type, particularly the risk of radiation leakage.

A convoy leaves the Royal Ordnance factory at Burghfield, in Berkshire, every month to deliver fresh warheads to the Royal Navy at Coulport and collect unstable ones for refurbishing. Convoys are led by motorcycle outriders and guarded by armed troops.

Protests have also been made by members of the Faslane peace camp, who at the weekend handed out leaflets saying that if the accident — which happened in the centre of Helensburgh — had been more serious it could have caused an explosion. They asked for witnesses to come forward.

A spokesman for the Scottish Office said last night that the complaint would be passed to the Ministry of Defence.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman in London confirmed that there had been an accident, "but ministry policy is not to discuss the presence or otherwise of nuclear weapons" he said.

COLLISION WITH NUCLEAR WASTE DUMP

SUBSTORY

PNW 25.5.84

Last September, a US Poseidon nuclear submarine collided with a nuclear waste dump 175 miles south-west of Land's End. It burst waste containers, contaminating its hull and then spent five months touring British waters before entering the US Navy base at Holy Loch on the Clyde for a clean-up.

The submarine, the USS Sam Rayburn, first attracted attention when it appeared at Holy Loch in mid-January. The Scottish Campaign to Resist the Atomic Menace (SCRAM) has pieced together its movements

Sam Rayburn's arrival because it is a rare visitor to the Loch and because it arrived accompanied by Royal Navy tugs and the spy-ship, the USS Vanguard. When unusual activity began around the submarine, questions were put to the US Navy. Their statement, that the USS Andrew Jackson had not been into base and that there had been no radioactive leak, impressed no-one. The Sam Rayburn left on February 18, returned at the end of the month, and went into drydock to have its paintwork scraped off by 200-300 civilian workers in protective suits

keep radioactive dust down. This activity attracted some national attention, and more reassurances that there was no danger.

Then, a reporter with the Plymouth Sunday Independent received information that at 6.15am on September 2, the submarine had collided with nuclear waste barrels on the sea-bed 175 miles south-west of Land's End. As we went to press the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were checking their records to see whether there have been officially authorised waste dumps there.

Why the submarine was on the seabed there is unclear. An intriguing possibility—one which may also explain the Sam Rayburn's unique catwalk around its conning tower—is that the submarine was involved with the US submarine-detection microphones in the area.

Warhead crash action call

1/7/85 T. 1.7.8

A public inquiry into a road accident involving two nuclear warhead carriers has been demanded by Dumbarton District Council in Scotland.

The vehicles formed part of the monthly convoy which transports refurbished Polaris missile warheads from the Royal Ordnance factory at Berkshire, to the nuclear submarine base at Faslane. After the accident, at Helensburgh, Strathclyde, one of the warhead