

## **SECRET NUCLEAR SUBMARINE ACCIDENT PLANS**

The visit of another nuclear-powered submarine to Southampton Docks "Z Berth" (Echo 23 June) is bad news. Although the vessel carries no nuclear weapons, the nuclear reactor on board presents a hazard, especially to children and pregnant women. It is wholly irresponsible of the Navy to put the public at an unnecessary risk by inviting them onto the submarine in an effort to regain public confidence after their cancelled open day in April.

### **Potassium Iodate Tablets (PITS)**

Children are most vulnerable to the effects of radiation, and potassium iodate tablets (PITS) can be given to block the up-take of radioactive iodine by the thyroid gland. Speed is of the essence since the tablets are only effective 'before' or just after exposure. The City Council SOTONSAFE Plan is designed to try to protect people in the event of a nuclear submarine accident. It says that that everyone in the 2Km Automatic Countermeasures Zone should take shelter and that schools, care-homes and other distribution centres would be involved in the distribution of PITS. But how can this be done over a weekend when children are not in school? And have parents given permission for medication to be administered by teachers? If people can be contacted, the Plan says one member of their group will be instructed to walk (unprotected) for up to 15 minutes to collect PITS from the nearest distribution centre. Do people know this? Where is the nearest distribution centre? Why are these plans kept under wraps? Is it because people would be alarmed? Unfortunately the City Council has failed to answer such questions and refuses to disseminate this important information to the public. Even more worrying, is its refusal to provide the information to Head Teachers – they are told to go and look in the Public Library for the Safety Plan!

### **Protest Against Nuclear Powered Submarines in the Docks**

Protests at these nuclear submarine visits have been made since the early 1980s. Some people thought it was a risky business then, but now the dangers are more widely recognized. Scientific knowledge about the effects of low-level radiation on the DNA of cells has increased. It is no longer accepted that low-level radiation presents little or no risk to people. Governments around the world are concerned about discharges and the constant risk of a nuclear accident at nuclear power stations. The German government has just announced that it is to close German nuclear power stations; the Nordic countries and Ireland are pressing hard for the closure of BNFL Sellafield in Cumbria. As with Chernobyl, a radioactive plume is no respecter of borders and boundaries. The difference between a nuclear power station and a submarine reactor is one of scale. A power station has a far larger reactor than a submarine although the principle of using highly radioactive fuel rods to power a generator is the same. If the risks and dangers from

nuclear power stations are now seen to outweigh the benefit of producing electricity, how much more does the risk from a submarine reactor outweigh the navy's need for a public relations exercise! Since there is no benefit to ordinary people here, what is the point of putting us at this risk?

### **Legal Action**

After the visit of HMS Splendid in April, readers may recall that a coalition of environment and peace groups called Southampton Coalition Against Nuclear Ships decided to challenge the decision to bring submarines with nuclear reactors into the City. We also challenge the lack of dissemination of information to the public. Thanks to the generosity of Southampton people, we have already raised £840, but we are £160 short of the £1,000 necessary to put into court as a gesture of our seriousness in pursuing the case. In addition, we will have our own costs for travelling to lawyers meetings and basic administration. Anyone who wishes to contribute to the legal fund can do so by sending a cheque to N.I.S. c/o30 Westwood Road, Southampton SO17 1DN.

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Nuclear Information Service

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