

# SOUTHERN Daily Echo

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By

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## Don't put people at nuclear risk

THE Sotonsafe Exercise, Foxwater 2006 is to take place next year on February 22.

Led by Southampton City Council and paid for by the Ministry of Defence, this nuclear accident exercise is to test the safety plan for a submarine nuclear reactor accident in Southampton docks if Z Berth is reopened.

The plan would involve stopping and directing movements of the public, sheltering and evacuation plans and the distribution of potassium iodine tablets (PITS) to prevent thyroid cancer.

Progress has been made by the Solent Coalition Against Nuclear Ships (SCANS) to gain some observer status at the exercise, but we continue to be concerned that time spent organising this exercise is a distraction from essential council emergency planning and other emergency services' work.

Legal advice to the group is that the Royal Navy is in breach of an European directive that requires the British government to include military nuclear sites in nuclear safety regulations.

Although the government is keen to comply with some aspects of safety requirements, there is a reluctance to justify putting Southampton people at risk.

SCANS considers that this exercise will expose the impossibility of ensuring the safety of people in a nuclear accident

and thus fail the balancing justification test that the EC regulations demand.

Communities living near nuclear power plants need the best safety plan they can get, whereas Southampton has no need of a safety plan because there is no nuclear risk.

In a recent letter to SCANS, the council stated that no nuclear powered vessel can enter the docks prior to the exercise or before any resulting amendments to the operator's and the off-site plans.

SCANS contends that there is no real operational reason for nuclear submarines to use Southampton docks, since the Z berth has been in abeyance for four years, and was little used before that.

Apart from recruiting submariners in Southampton and "showing the flag" it is not clear what purpose there is in keeping the last Z berth in a commercial port in Britain.

All other commercial port Z berths have been closed over the past few years.

Portsmouth and Devonport naval dockyards provide such berths on the south coast, with the only others being in Scotland.

The Navy denies the Z berth is needed for an emergency at sea, and have given categorical assurance that it would never be used for a damaged submarine.

The only credible argument the MoD offers, is that if access to Southampton is lost, how will local authorities worldwide be convinced Z berths are fine? But actually, only Bermuda, Diego Garcia and the Falkland Isles have British Z berths.

The golden rule in risk assessment is the precautionary principle: don't put people at risk if you can help it.

A real nuclear accident doesn't bear thinking about, but those of us who do think about it are very well aware that the consequences would be devastating and blight lives, communities, local economics and the very land we live on for years to come.