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Nuclear subs are safe

by SANDRA LAVILLE

THE RISK of a serious accident involving decommissioned nuclear submarines in Plymouth has been all but ruled out by independent consultants.

But in the "barely credible" event of a worst scale fire on a defuelled submarine at Devonport Dockyard the public in the most exposed areas would receive radiation doses four times the maximum annual limit imposed by the National Radiological Protection Board.

A report by Edinburgh Radiation Consultants on the environmental impact of decommissioning submarines at Devonport Dockyard is due to be discussed by councillors in Plymouth on Monday.

It is the third and final report from ERC on decommissioning and uses analysis of radiation levels at Rosyth, where the submarine Dreadnought was decommissioned, for much of its information.

Experts say risk is remote

Dr Robert Wheaton from ERC has made two recommendations to the council to improve the monitoring of any radiation leakage from the submarines and reduce the radiation dose the general public would receive in what he calls the "unlikely event" of a fire on board.

HMS Warspite and Conqueror, built in the 1960s, are being stored at Devonport.

Radioactivity

Warspite has had the fuel taken out which makes up about 98 percent of the radioactivity, according to the Navy.

Equipment which can be used again like the periscope has also been removed and the hatches have been closed

and the vessel taken out of commission.

Conqueror is due to be defuelled next year. There have been discussions about proposals to decommission the submarines which involves dealing with the reactor plant inside but there have been no hard and fast proposals on how this is to be done, according to Peter Morgan from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

In the report Dr Wheaton examines the environmental impact of mooring submarines at the stages of Conqueror and Warspite at Devonport.

He concludes that the probable radiation dose to dockside workers is very small and estimated at considerably less than two per cent of

the 10 millisieverts a year set by Devonport Management Limited.

In the case of liquid contamination into the dockyard basins and worries about the submarine hull rusting and the subsequent release of radiation he says even in the most pessimistic scenario there would be no radiological threat to the environment.

Dr Wheaton suggests however in his first recommendation to the council that there should be monitoring of the dockyard basin sediments to check for any leakage from the submarines.

Disintegration

A worst case scenario accident involves the penetration of the submarine reactor and some form of disintegration of the hull to release loose radioactive material which Dr Wheaton describes as "highly unlikely."

The effects on dock workers and the public would be well below the NRPB lifetime radiation limits.

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N-waste is red peril

NUCLEAR accidents and waste have made significant parts of Russian territory uninhabitable for decades and a clean-up will cost unimaginable sums, the republic's new environment minister says.

Victor Danilov-Daniliyan said Russians were still being uprooted for resettlement in safe areas as a result of decades of nuclear mishaps.