

Sailors tested after submarine develops fault

JASON ALLARDYCE

DETAILS of a fault aboard a nuclear submarine which required 130 sailors to be tested for radioactive contamination were confirmed last night on the eve of the navy's largest-ever nuclear accident emergency exercise which takes place on the Clyde today.

The engineering fault developed on HMS Turbulent in the North Atlantic as it undertook post-refit trials on 7 November.

Scottish anti-nuclear campaigners believe a radioactive reactor leak occurred on the Trafalgar-class vessel but Ministry of Defence officials refused to confirm or deny whether that was the case.

The fault was dealt with after the submarine returned to its Plymouth base and servicemen were given urine tests to establish if they had been exposed to dangerous radiation.

The embarrassment could not come at a worse time for the MoD as it prepares today for the simulated nuclear accident exercise at the Faslane submarine base in the presence of the

armed forces minister, John Reid.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament said the incident proved that MoD assurances on safety were unreliable.

"This incident shows that contrary to what the MoD is always telling us, accidents do occur on nuclear submarines," said the Scottish CND administrator John Ainslie. "It also shows the typical MoD reaction to a nuclear incident - hushing up details and not informing the local population."

But an MoD spokesman denied that the navy had been unduly secretive.

"If we were to trumpet this on the front pages of the press that would be alarmist," he said.

The spokesman said that he was unable to confirm exactly what had gone wrong but he stressed that no-one on board had suffered any injury.

CND observers, who have been monitoring the build-up to the exercise, plan to set up an alternative incident room providing regular updates on what they say will really be going on.

Sc 18/11/97