

# Alarm over nuclear reactors and weapons lost at sea

## EXCLUSIVE

By Rob Edwards

A HUGE mass of radioactive material, including nuclear weapons, submarine reactors, spacecraft with nuclear generators, and test devices, has been lost at sea.

The startling revelation is contained in a report, to be published in November, from the inter-governmental agency which promotes and monitors the nuclear industry.

It contains the first official confirmation that HMS Sheffield, sunk by Argentina in the Falklands war, was carrying nuclear weapons. The report also reveals that a Clyde-based submarine lost a Polaris missile at sea and that an American F-14 jet dropped a nuclear bomb 75 miles off the coast of Scotland.

It was prepared by the International Atomic Energy Agency for a major conference in London on marine pollution. The report, which draws on information provided by governments, lists 31 accidents at sea involving the loss of nuclear material between 1950 and 1991. 15 of which have been confirmed.

In addition to the two from Britain, 18 were from America (10 confirmed), nine from the Soviet Union (three confirmed), and one each from France and Japan (both

confirmed). Altogether the accidents have led to the loss of about 50 nuclear weapons and eight submarine reactors. The amount of radioactivity involved in the seven cases where information is provided is huge, but the IAEA could not verify how much was released into the sea and called on individual states to provide more information.

Other radioactive materials mislaid include four spacecraft with nuclear generators, two nuclear test devices, two "unspecified capsules of nuclear material" and a whole cargo of uranium hexafluoride in the North Sea.

Greenpeace said yesterday that the loss of the Polaris missile from HMS Resol-

ution, one of four submarines of its type based on the Clyde, off Florida on May 19, 1985, was alarming. "Once radioactivity has poisoned the sea it can enter the food chain and will remain active for at least a quarter of a million years," a spokeswoman said.

The report, a draft dated July 23, 1991, and sent to the International Maritime Organisation in London, discloses how a Phoenix missile was "dropped" by a US F-14 fighter on September 14, 1976. It is said to have been recovered. Although the incidents are listed as "unconfirmed", the International Atomic Energy Agency, a

United Nations organisation to promote and police nuclear power, said the data came from the British and US governments. Circulars were sent by the agency to the governments concerned, an IAEA spokesman in Vienna said yesterday.

The response from the Ministry of Defence yesterday was to reiterate a 1982 ministerial statement in the wake of the HMS Sheffield sinking that "there has never been any incident involving a British nuclear weapon leading to its loss or the dispersal of radioactive contamination". It said that in 1985 HMS Resolusion successfully fired an unarmed Polaris missile off Cape Canaveral, Florida.

When asked to explain how these responses could be reconciled with the IAEA report, an IAEA spokeswoman said that was not her business.

Tomagrow Greenpeace will reveal that official Soviet estimates of the impact of a serious accident aboard a nuclear powered vessel are much worse than the British government's published scenarios for the nuclear submarine bases at Faslane on the Clyde and Rosyth on the Forth. Allegations that the reactors that power Polaris submarines are cracked — first made in Scotland on Sunday last November — were confirmed by a much-publicised television documentary last week.