

# **NAG NEWSLETTER**

**WINTER / SPRING 2016**

**[www.nuclearawarenessgroup.org](http://www.nuclearawarenessgroup.org)**

## **NAG Diary**

### **Next Meeting:**

**Recent powerful evidence on radiation risks**

***Talk by Dr Ian Fairlie***

**7pm on Wednesday 2nd March  
at the RISC Centre, 35-39 London Street  
Reading RG1 4PS**

## **WARHEAD CONVOYS**

### **Nukewatchers harrassed**

On January 8th and 9th a heavily guarded convoy carrying nuclear warheads was monitored by Nukewatchers all the way from AWE Burghfield to the Royal Navy Armaments Depot at Coulport on Loch Long. This was a normal activity for Nukewatchers, but on this occasion when the convoy reached Stirling in Scotland they were subjected to police harassment. A car which was trailing the convoy was pulled over and given a detailed road worthiness check (one faulty rear light), and at Ballengeich another group who were filming the convoy were stopped and questioned by police (who eventually conceded that no criminal offence had taken place).

## **Convoy safety concerns**

The matter came to the attention of the Scottish Press, and resulted in the MSP for Stirling, Bruce Crawford, lodging a motion in the Scottish Parliament condemning the risk to the public posed by these convoys, and asking for cross-party support in demanding clarification of the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) safety procedures and a stop to the convoys. He has also written to Defence Secretary Michael Fallon.

On 20th January the MP for Midlothian, Owen Thompson, presented a 10 Minute Rule Bill about warhead convoys in the House of Commons. He drew attention not only to the risks the convoy may pose to local civilians, but also to the fact that increasing numbers of members of the public are commenting on convoy trips using social media. He was also concerned that the replacement of Trident would result in increased frequency of convoy movements. The Bill is scheduled to be discussed again on 4th March.

In an interesting riposte from John Woodcock, pro-Trident MP for Barrow-in-Furness where the submarines are built, it was said that his constituents regularly get issued iodine tablets as well as emergency instructions for a nuclear incident. His constituents, he said, unlike those of Midlothian, have a mature understanding of the safety situation – they have confidence in the MoD. This is not surprising since their jobs depend on it!

Emergency instructions are also regularly given to people living within 3km of AWEs Aldermaston and Burghfield but no iodine tablets. The public living in the vicinity of convoy routes are given neither. This, as was pointed out by Owen Thompson, shows a “blatant disregard and lack of judgement in relation to our own citizens”.

## **Drones over Aldermaston**

In response to a question in the house of Commons, an assurance was given that permission from the Civil Aviation Authority is needed to fly an unmanned aircraft in the vicinity of a nuclear plant. It is a criminal offence to do so without permission.

# **THE FUTURE OF TRIDENT**

## **Costs**

According to the Strategic Defence and Security Review which was presented to Parliament in November, the estimated cost of replacing the four submarines to replace the current ones has risen dramatically. It now stands at £31 billion, having risen from the original estimate (2006) of £11-14 billion and then a revised estimate

of £25 billion in 2014. In anticipation that this may not be the final cost, an additional £10 billion has been set aside for contingencies.

Why is Trident replacement so expensive and unpredictable? According to The Times of 12 November last, it is because it is easier to put a man on the moon than to build one of these submarines! BAE Systems, which is building seven nuclear-propelled but not nuclear-armed “Astute” submarines, say that this is one of the most complex engineering endeavours to be undertaken in the UK, which may be why they are years behind schedule on delivery of the Astute project. Nuclear-armed submarines will add an extra dimension of complexity to the building process.

### **The timescale**

Because of the MoD's poor record of delivering projects on time and within budget, the Government is considering giving the Trident replacement project to a new body which would be responsible to the Treasury. Among the partners in the new body would be submarine builders BAE Systems and Rolls Royce. Not surprisingly, the MOD is said to be resisting the idea, which would cut out a substantial chunk of its empire. It is not yet clear who is winning on this one.

Also unclear is where AWE Aldermaston fits into this scenario. As at last summer, the Government were also thinking in terms of replacing AWEML with another more competent contractor.

The present Vanguard class Trident submarines are due to be retired in 2028 - that's in 12 years time. It is expected to take 12 years to bring a replacement on stream, so the official start date should be tomorrow! The vote in Parliament to proceed has not yet taken place, and might not be straightforward because of the opposition, including from the military, and there is still a question mark over who is going to run the project.

Replacing Trident would be a huge undertaking, ranking in scale with Crossrail and HS2, yet it is already looking shaky.

## **STILL NAGGING**

Recent nags include a letter to Rob Wilson MP about our concerns that the management of AWE is incompetent. Our reasons for concern:

- Long delays in replacing ageing facilities where dangerous operations like warhead assembly and disassembly are carried out.
- Long delays in treating stored radioactive waste and ONR's helplessness to make AWE get on with it.
- Cutting jobs while there is a shortage of qualified staff.

Mr Wilson has passed our letter on to the Secretary of State, Dept of Energy and Climate Change.

We have also questioned the ONR about an incident relating to mis-labelling of explosive material at Aldermaston. They tell us (and also responded to a similar question in Parliament) that the incidents were too minor to warrant action being taken.

## **RADIOACTIVE WASTE – PROGRESS WITH FINDING A SOLUTION**

Progress with finding somewhere to put the accumulated and growing radioactive waste in the proposed Geological “Disposal” Facility (a misnomer, since putting the stuff underground doesn't actually dispose of it) is slow.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change has set up a working group called the Community Representation Working Group. Its purpose is to develop practical processes for how any community that puts itself forward for consideration to host the GDF (don't all rush) can be represented, public support tested, and “community investment” (sweeteners) will operate. Much bureaucracy is involved.

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