

NUKEWATCH

www.nukewatch.org.uk

Warhead convoy movements summary 2016

The log below is based principally on observations by Nukewatchers, but complemented by deduction as to the purpose of each convoy journey and whether or not warheads were carried.

Nukewatch considers that during 2016 at least six loaded convoys travelled between the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Burghfield and the Coulport arms depot in Scotland, and at least five loaded convoys travelled in the opposite direction. We estimate that between 17 and 34 nuclear warheads were delivered to Coulport and between 14 and 28 warheads were returned to AWE. Our best estimate is that 34 warheads were delivered to Coulport and 28 warheads were returned to AWE, ie that warhead movements were at the upper limit of the range.

It must be stressed that these figures are an estimate and that convoy journeys will have taken place that Nukewatch was unable to monitor. The overall picture of all convoy movements during the year represents a similar level of activity when compared with activity over the past four to five years. However, the number of convoys carrying nuclear weapons has more than doubled when compared with the previous four years. Convoy exercise activities are also thought to have taken place during the year, possibly in February and October, at a correspondingly lower level of activity than over recent years.

The pattern of convoy movements observed is consistent with an operation to return warheads equivalent to a single submarine's complement to AWE for refurbishment. In December 2015 HMS Vanguard entered Devonport dockyard for a three year refit, prior to which nuclear weapons would have been unloaded from the submarine. At the same time HMS Vengeance left Devonport following a refit, and re-entered service soon after completing a Demonstration and Shakedown Operation (DASO) in June 2016. Convoy movements suggest that over the first half of the year enough warheads were refurbished by AWE to allow HMS Vengeance to re-enter service with a largely, if not fully, refurbished complement of warheads. Production of the UK Trident Mark 4A upgrade was scheduled to have commenced sometime in 2015 and Nukewatch considers that the convoy movements observed in the first part of 2016 represented an operation to move the first of the Mark 4A upgraded warheads to Coulport.

Over the period 2011 – 2014 a surplus of warheads was returned to AWE when compared with the numbers delivered to Coulport. Nukewatch considers that this is evidence that Trident warheads have been decommissioned at a slow rate in line with a commitment to reduce the number of UK nuclear warheads which was announced in the Strategic Defence and Security Review. Over the last two years this trend has ceased and it appears that there has been a suspension of warhead decommissioning work.

Also of note is that an equal number of continuous runs and journeys with overnight stops between AWE and Coulport took place this year, in contrast with the trend for continuous running over recent years. There appeared to be a two month pause in convoy journeys at the end of the year (which continued until March 2017)

Special Nuclear Materials (SNM) convoys

From August 2015 special nuclear materials and high security cargoes have been transported in the same vehicles that are used to move nuclear warheads. Nukewatch has observed some movements of these convoys, which are shown in the log below.

One SNM convoy may have travelled between AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield, delivering warhead components from Aldermaston to Burghfield, in April. Another SNM convoy was observed travelling between AWE Aldermaston and RNAD Coulport, also in April, probably delivering tritium to Coulport. A journey observed at the end of October may also have taken tritium to Coulport. A convoy journey observed earlier in October may have been transporting highly enriched uranium pellets for submarine reactor fuel from AWE Aldermaston to Rolls-Royce Derby. Nukewatch does not monitor all SNM convoys, and further unmonitored SNM convoys are likely to have also made journeys over the year.

Trip purpose	Date Out	Date In	From	To	Load	No trucks	Route
	Mon 04.07.16	Mon 04.07.16	AWE Aldermaston	AWE Burghfield	Unladen	4 ¹	
4 Trident up	Wed 06.07.16?	Thurs 07.07.16	AWE Burghfield	RNAD Coulport	Loaded	3	M6 M74
4 return Trident	Mon 11.07.16	Tues 12.07.16	RNAD Coulport	AWE Burghfield	Loaded	3	M9 A68 M1
	Mon 18.07.16	Mon 18.07.16	AWE Burghfield	AWE Aldermaston	Unladen	4 ¹	
	Fri 09.09.16	Fri 09.09.16	AWE Aldermaston	AWE Burghfield	Unladen	4	
6 Trident up	Wed 14.09.16	Thurs 15.09.16	AWE Burghfield	RNAD Coulport	Loaded	4	A1 M9
6 return Trident	Mon 19.09.16	Tues 20.09.16?	RNAD Coulport	AWE Burghfield	Loaded	4	M80 M74 A66 A1
	?	?	AWE Burghfield	AWE Aldermaston	Unladen	4	
SNM?	Tues 11.10.16	?	AWE Aldermaston	?	?	?	M4 M40 ²
	?	?	?	AWE Aldermaston	?	?	
Exercise? SNM?	Mon 24.10.16	Tues 25.10.16	AWE Aldermaston	RNAD Coulport	?	3?4?	M6
Exercise? SNM?	Wed 26.10.16	Thurs 27.10.16	RNAD Coulport	AWE Aldermaston	?	3?4?	M74 M6

Notes:

- ¹ One warhead carrier of the four which arrived at AWE Burghfield is believed not to have travelled to RNAD Coulport..
- ² Report from a member of the public.

**IF YOU SEE A CONVOY PLEASE RING ONE OF THESE NUKEWATCH NUMBERS
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE:**

South: 0345 45 88 364
North: 0345 45 88 365
Mobile: 07796 226 488
Mobile: 07790 409 339

We need to know what you saw, when you saw it, where, and what direction the convoy vehicles were travelling in.

For more information please see the Nukewatch website at www.nukewatch.org.uk