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What to do in a radiation emergency

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Environmental
Agency Gibraltar



Ministry
of Defence

What to do in a Radiation Emergency



This guide tells you what you need to do in the extremely unlikely event of a radiation emergency at HM Naval Base, Gibraltar.

It has been produced by HM Government of Gibraltar, in consultation with the Director of Public Health, Environmental Agency and the Ministry of Defence.

What is a radiation emergency?

The design of nuclear-powered submarines and ships means the likelihood of a radiation incident is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY**. There is absolutely no risk of a 'nuclear bomb'-type explosion.

Who will be affected?

If an incident happened, it probably wouldn't affect people more than half a kilometre from the vessel, and because of the distance from the operational berth at the South Mole, this would **PROBABLY** only affect people within the naval base.

What could happen in a radiation emergency?

Usually, all radioactive material would be contained in the submarine or ship. In some extreme circumstances it is possible that some of this radioactive material could escape and affect areas close to the vessel or downwind of it. In such an emergency, people in the naval base who were very close to the vessel could be exposed to gamma radiation, which is very similar to x-rays.

The main risk to the public would be if very tiny radioactive particles were released into the air. They might be carried by the wind and could settle on people or objects that people were in contact with. These tiny particles are unstable and give off radiation.

You could be exposed to radioactive particles by:

- Inhaling contaminated air or gases
- Having contact with contaminated surfaces
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Direct exposure from particles as they are blown along in a 'plume'

What can radiation do and how do I stay safe?

Radiation is a form of energy we are exposed to all the time, from natural and man-made sources. In some forms it can be harmful to humans and other living things because it can damage cells. This can result in damage to organs or other long term effects.

In this type of incident, the main immediate concern for the public could be exposure to radioactive iodate particles.

Your body can absorb a limited amount of iodates, so taking stable iodine tablets when advised by the authorities can reduce the health risks by preventing the body absorbing certain radioactive material.

The main way to stay safe is to stay inside with your windows and doors shut, then none of the radioactive particles can reach you.

More instructions on what to do are on the following pages.

How will I know about an emergency?

You will know if there is a radiation emergency because the emergency services will tell you, and you will hear or see a news announcement. The naval base siren will also be used – a rising and falling wailing note.

What should I do if there's an emergency?

Go In, Stay In, Tune In

GO IN

In a radiation emergency the best thing to do is go indoors.

- Close all your doors and windows to reduce the risk of contamination entering the building.
- Switch off fans, ventilation equipment or appliances such as air-conditioning units, which draw air from outside. This will help stop any contamination entering the building.
- Put out or damp down open fires

STAY IN

- Don't go outside, where radiation could be higher, unless you're told to.
- Keep pets indoors, to stop them bringing possible contamination into the house.
- If your children are at school, the school will look after them – going to collect your children may expose you and them to radiation.

TUNE IN

Information and advice will be on local radio and TV and social media e.g. HM GoG/RGP Twitter pages.

- Keep listening and watching
- Follow any instructions you are given Local radio stations include:
- GBC Radio (91.3 FM, 92.6 FM, 100.5 FM 1458 MW)
- BFBS Radio (93.5 FM, 97.8FM)

Health issues: refer to GHA 111

Don't use the phone unless you urgently need help In an

emergency, mobile and landline networks might be overloaded. If you must make a call, please keep it short.

When should I take stable iodine tablets?

Exposure to radioactive material can be hazardous. But taking stable iodine tablets minimises the health risks, by preventing the body absorbing certain harmful material.

Tablets will be delivered to all homes in the affected area by members of the armed forces or be available through distribution centres.

The authorities will tell you when to take the tablets, so keep tuned to the local radio stations, TV and social media sites. It is important you don't take the tablets until you are told to, if they are taken at the wrong time they might not protect you when it is needed. Where appropriate, children at school will be given stable iodine tablets.

After being told to take the tablets you should still stay indoors.

The tablets help to protect you, but staying inside is still the best protection. Don't worry if you have friends or relatives living further from the base that don't get tablets, there will be no immediate need for them to take the tablets. In the hours following an incident the emergency responders will decide if the area should be expanded, based on contamination levels. It's unlikely they will have to take this step. Anyone with specific medical conditions (including pregnant & breastfeeding women) will be offered medical advice through GHA 111.

Should I leave the area?

The best thing to do is stay at home, you will be much safer indoors with your windows and doors shut. There will probably be no need for an evacuation. But if you are advised to leave, follow the advice you're given. Entry to evacuated areas will be carefully controlled until the emergency has ended so don't worry if you have to leave your home. If you are advised to evacuate, use this checklist:

- Get your family and pets together.
- Get a bag and pack the following things:
 1. Additional clothing and bedding.
 2. Medicines or special food your family and pets need.
 3. If you have children, think about baby food, clothes, nappies and toys.
 4. Private documents and valuables, such as bank cards and passports.
- Make sure fires are out and that cookers, ventilation equipment, fans, TVs, electric fires and other appliances are switched off and unplugged.
- Lock up your house and any other buildings and leave.

What happens to schools?

They have stable iodine tablets for all the children and staff in their care. In the event of an incident the school will look after the children – going to collect your children may expose you and them to radiation. When it is safe for children to leave the building the school will contact you

Will this affect food and drink?

It is unlikely that tap water, food or drink in your house that is covered or sealed, will be affected. You should wait for advice before eating anything stored outside or growing in an allotment or garden. More advice and information on this will be given out as an incident progresses.

What do I do when the immediate danger has passed?

You should keep listening and looking for announcements and updates on the news/social media.



Useful contacts

| | |
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| Police/Fire/Ambulance emergency | 999 |
| Royal Gibraltar Police (Non-emergency) | 20072500 |
| Gibraltar Fire & Rescue Services (Non-emergency) | 20072936 |



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