

Weapons inspectors visit Northumberland nuclear site

On Saturday afternoon, a team of citizens' inspectors visited Albemarle Barracks near Stamfordham, and soon gained access to carry out a visual inspection of the 'secure vehicle compound' used by nuclear warheads convoys. Twenty inspectors, from the newly-formed Tyneside Citizens' Inspection Agency (CIA), visited the site to draw attention to the government's nuclear weapons policy, and to its refusal to allow international inspections of nuclear sites within this country, while demanding intrusive access to Iraqi sites and preaching a non-nuclear message to the rest of the world. Tyneside CIA had written to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in November, asking for access to inspect the site, but have still never received a reply.

After arrival at the north side of the barracks, at 2pm on Saturday, the inspectors climbed over a gate into the site, and walked apparently undetected up to the convoy compound. They found gaps in the outermost fence and rings of barbed wire, and could easily walk through to the inner security fences. Several of the inspectors had walked right around the fence before military personnel and police turned up. The compound has been used since the 1980s by military convoys, carrying Trident nuclear warheads from the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in Berkshire to the submarine base and arms depot in Scotland. Monica Frisch, one of yesterday's inspectors, said,

We found no evidence that the compound has been closed or isn't still being used for nuclear transports. We know that the UK has nuclear weapons, with one Trident submarine permanently on patrol, ready to fire any of its 100-kiloton warheads at a moment's notice. The deployment of the UK's weapons of mass destruction bears a heavy price, not just in terms of money spent and wasted resources, but also in terms of the security implications and dangers involved in taking nuclear warheads on our local roads and storing them in insecure compounds like the one at Albemarle.

After inspecting the site, the team fixed "Closed!" notices to the gates and fence, wished the onlooking police and soldiers a "Happy Christmas", and left, promising to compile a full report about the site. Andrew Gray summarised the main conclusions of the team on their findings of lax security at the compound,

Disarmament is the only safe option for nuclear weapons, both for the people of Stamfordham and others who live in the 'fallout' area around the nuclear convoy routes, and for the sake of wider global security and nuclear non-proliferation.

Further information, including copies of notices left at the site and a link to photographs of the inspection, is available at <http://tyneside.sdf-eu.org/albemarle>. Further photographs may be available, contact Andrew Gray for more details.

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