

Report taken from WalesOnline

RAF AIRCRAFT have breached a no-fly safety zone three times in the past two years around an English nuclear power station within sight of the old Severn Bridge, it has been revealed.

Last night Welsh Labour MP Llew Smith, who was given the information by Defence Minister Adam Ingram in answer to a parliamentary question, said the disclosure was shocking.

"The consequences, should a crash occur, would be an unimaginable catastrophe," said Mr Smith, the MP for Blaenau Gwent.

He also attacked the Ministry of Defence for keeping details of the breaches secret.

"It is very worrying, the way this information has occurred. The Ministry of Defence should reveal such incidents as a matter of course."

Like all nuclear installations in Britain, Berkeley Power Station in Gloucestershire has a no-fly zone around it. Aircraft are forbidden from flying below 2,000ft and within two nautical miles (2.3 miles).

Like Trawsfynydd Power Station in Gwynedd, Berkeley Magnox Power Station is shut, with the site defuelled and dismantled down to its biological shields and reactor cores within. Next door, the Berkeley laboratories have substantial amounts of very active radioactive waste from its post irradiation (fuel) examination facility.

Mr Smith said as well as the possibility of accidental crashes into nuclear facilities, he was also concerned about terrorist attacks, with aircraft crashing into reactors and radioactive waste stores.

In his answer to Mr Smith, the minister said, "Restricted areas for aircraft have existed around nuclear facilities for many years. In the aftermath of 9/11 the Civil Aviation Authority revisited this policy, issuing an amendment to Article 85 of the Air Navigation Order, and now major nuclear installations have a restricted area of two nautical miles radius."

He said there had been a total of five confirmed breaches of no-fly zones since the beginning of 2002. Three were at Berkeley and the others at Torness Power Station in East Lothian and Dungeness Power Station in Kent.

This week, the Glasgow Sunday Herald revealed there had been a further breach at Chapelcross Power Station in Dumfries and Galloway.

The MoD insists that even in the six instances where infringements are known to have occurred, there was never any danger of a crash.

BNFL, the company which runs nuclear power stations, said, "We report all alleged incidents of low-flying aircraft to the Civil Aviation Authority which has the responsibility for enforcing the restricted zones. If we can identify the aircraft as belonging to the military, we also report the incident to the MoD."

The MoD said all reports were investigated, but infringements were very rare. No disciplinary action had been taken against offending pilots, but they were informed so they could learn from their mistakes.