

Greenpeace protest ship off French nuclear test site

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ABOARD THE GREENPEACE - The environmental protest ship Greenpeace arrived off the French nuclear test site of Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific Saturday amid tight surveillance from the French military.

The Greenpeace, a converted tug, linked up with four yachts from New Zealand that sailed to join its protest against French nuclear testing. The French plan to set off an underwater nuclear explosion this month and radio reports have said the test could come next week.

The Greenpeace and the other ships are completing the campaign originally planned for the environmental protest group's flagship, the Rainbow Warrior, before it was mined and sunk by French secret service agents in the harbor of Auckland, New Zealand, on July 10. One Greenpeace crewman died in the blasts.

Revelation of the French government's role in the sinking led to the resignation of the defense minister and the firing of the chief of intelligence in September.

The Greenpeace was shadowed by four French naval vessels. The ships were about 40 miles north of Mururoa, within the 60-mile security zone the French have designated around the atoll.

Greenpeace leaders contend that under international law the French control waters only within 12 miles of the atoll.

Mururoa is about 1,000 miles southeast of Tahiti in the Tuamotu Archipelago.

French vessels and aircraft have monitored the Greenpeace yacht Vega for the roughly 10 days it has been off Mururoa. Crew members said that on Sept. 27 the French delivered a formal warning to the crew that entry within the 12-mile international zone was prohibited.