

Civil defense: Can U.S. citizens be protected from nuclear war?

United Press International
World War III: wailing sirens, terror, full-scale panic, holocaust, death by incineration, by radiation, by dismemberment.

If it happened, is this the prospect — or an incorrect impression?

Most Americans seem to believe this. Nuclear warfare would make the earth a seared, poisoned planet. Survivors would exist like animals in a world so ugly and dangerous, life would not be worth living.

For more than 20 years, this belief has been cultivated by military and federal leaders. It has been reinforced by imaginative moviemakers and science fiction writers.

Today, the belief is deep-seated in the American psyche, so much so that renewed vitality in the federal civil defense program is generating widespread and determined resistance.

President Reagan approved in March a 7-year, \$4.3 billion civil defense program designed to give increased protection to the civilian population. White House officials say they will decide this fall whether to ask Congress to expand the program by another \$3 billion to protect key industrial facilities and workers.

So far the renewal of activity by the civil defense bureaucracy has been relatively minor. But this activity is making people angry, generating lengthy debate in Congress, lending substantial strength to the ever-present disarmament movement.

Reaction has been sharp. A 5-day wave of anti-nuclear sentiment in August brought record numbers of mass arrests.

On Aug. 9, 37th anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing, the "no nukes" movement provoked civil disobedience at military and nuclear facilities across the country — from Strategic Air Command bases in Nebraska and Michigan, to a research firm in New York City and fallout shelters in Atlanta.

At last count, 30 cities and towns — including Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and San Francisco — have issued formal, outright refusals to cooperate with nuclear civil defense planning.

Planning for protection of civilians against atomic weapons has been under way, with varied intensity, for more than 30

"Tens of millions of additional lives could be saved if even low-cost, realistic preparations were made — especially realistic preparations for evacuating our cities and rapidly building good expedient shelters during a worsening crisis." — Cresson H. Kearny.

years. But today, the civil defense controversy appears stronger than ever.

Proponents assert that even in an all-out attack, only 5 percent of the nation's land area would be affected by blast and heat. They say an adequate evacuation plan can save millions of lives — an effective shelter program can protect millions more against fallout. They reject the total destruction hypothesis.

Opponents say warning and shelter systems are useless and merely encourage war hysteria, given the destructiveness of modern weapons.

Jonathan Schell, in a series in The New Yorker magazine and a new book, "The Fate of the Earth," says any serious attempt by either side to protect its population from nuclear attack would probably result in increased armament by the opposing side.

Sweden, Switzerland, China,

Canada and other nations have extravagant civil defense plans at the ready. Some American experts believe Sweden could protect fully 90 percent of its population in case of an attack.

But others point out that only a few countries would actually suffer the direct effects of nuclear attack. The other nations only have to protect their civilians against the effects of fallout.

And many experts scoff at the Soviets' massive program, saying the Russians are good at setting up bureaucracies, but not very good at carrying out plans.

Still, they concede the Russian civil defense program is better than the preparations that have occurred so far in the United States, which are viewed across the nation as, at best, ineffective and, at worst, dangerous.

Tests of evacuation plans have proven to be failures. Theoretically air-tight to protect against fallout, shelters in Washington state were found contaminated with dust from the Mount St. Helen's eruption. Shelters are no longer stocked with edible foodstuffs. Radiation counters have been removed because of potential theft.

There are two options in case of attack: evacuation or taking cover in shelters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is at the top of the civil defense bureaucracy, released results of a poll July 3. It reported most Americans approve of plans to evacuate them from high-risk areas in the event of nuclear war. But it also showed that few make it their top civil defense concern and many are unaware the plans exist.

But opposition to evacuation planning has been intense.

In a list of "Ten Illusions of Civil Defense," two physicians, H. Jack Geiger and Eric Chivian,

note that even if major evacuations of the risk areas were successful, the Soviet Union would simply reset their weapons to strike different targets.

A spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency said the idea of communities voting on evacuation plans is a "new phenomenon." He said although 30 communities have voted not to take part in any evacuation planning against nuclear attack, the agency has not yet taken any steps to cut off federal funds to those communities.

In April, Philadelphia officials voted to reject any federal

"It is now commonly acknowledged that economically feasible shelters cannot provide protection against the blast, heat, intense radiation and mass fires that would probably occur in densely populated regions of the country." Jonathon Schell, author of "The Fate of the Earth."

funds for evacuation planning after hearing from 40 speakers representing medical, educational, scientific and religious organizations. There were no witnesses defending the idea of drawing up evacuation plans.

Two governmental bodies in California cities — San Francisco and nearby San Jose — voted against evacuation planning.

Beverlee Myers, California director of health services, opposing crisis relocation, said, planning for relocation of the population encourages the idea that world leaders can have nuclear shootouts without lots of civilian victims.

Many officials are upset that the 20-plus years planning for civil defense has produced little.

"The Center for Defense Information estimates that taxpayers have given \$2.7 billion for civil defense programs," said Marilyn Braun, director of North Carolina's Greensboro-Guildford County Emergency Management Assistance Agency. "But in this same period we have never seen anybody present a workable plan to minimally protect people from nuclear war."

Problems with civil defense planning already in existence are manifold.

The other option of civil defense, that of shelters, is discounted by Schell and others as ineffective.

Despite the controversy, civil defense planning will continue.

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U.S. civil defense history: up and down like hemlines

United Press International
In many nations, civil defense has been a top priority since civilians became bombing targets in World War II.

But most residents of the United States did not become threatened with wholesale destruction at home until 1949 when Russia first detonated an atomic weapon.

Like hemlines, America's civil defense budget has risen and fallen several times since then.

The Civil Defense Act was passed by Congress in 1950. In 1954, the government began releasing material for general distribution teaching the population that fallout, as well as blast damage, was a significant danger of atomic warfare.

There were studies, recommendations and some budgets set aside during the Eisenhower administration, but it remained

for President John F. Kennedy to become the moving force behind the nation's first full-scale CD program.

Kennedy won from Congress \$312 million to build shelters. His requests gained support because of the missile crisis in Cuba and the Berlin Wall crisis. Civil defense advocates of today say about 10 million Americans spontaneously evacuated their homes during the Cuban missile showdown.

But, for the most part, serious civil defense planning against nuclear attack died with Kennedy in Dallas. By 1969 the CD budget had been pared to \$49 million. Air raid drills in schools and factories ended. Shelter provisions were neglected, allowed to rot, sold as surplus or stolen.

The Johnson and Nixon administrations cut the CD

budgets substantially, funneling much of the money instead to the war in Southeast Asia.

A revival of civil defense planning occurred when President Jimmy Carter was convinced the Soviet Union was developing a massive system to protect its population in a nuclear conflict.

Now President Reagan has moved to effect the plans made under Carter but never funded.

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