

Here We Go Back to the Cave

Safety in Santa Cruz Mountains

BY GEORGE MURPHY
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ZAYANTE (Santa Cruz County)—“It’s not that we’re pessimistic—we’re just realists.”

That’s the way Mitchel Kaufman explains the existence of an “atomic-bomb proof” vault buried deep in the Santa Cruz Mountains near this tiny community.

ACTUALLY, Western States Atomic Vaults, Inc., is an abandoned railroad tunnel which has been lined with three-foot concrete walls, humidified and temperature-controlled to preserve the literally hundreds of thousands of feet of microfilm stored there.

The amount of information recorded on microfilm ranges from county records (18 in Northern California alone) to government documents from the Bahamas dating back to 1750.

THERE IS also what Kaufman calls “classified” material from the Federal Government. “And,” Kaufman says, politely but firmly, “it’s better that we don’t discuss that at all.”

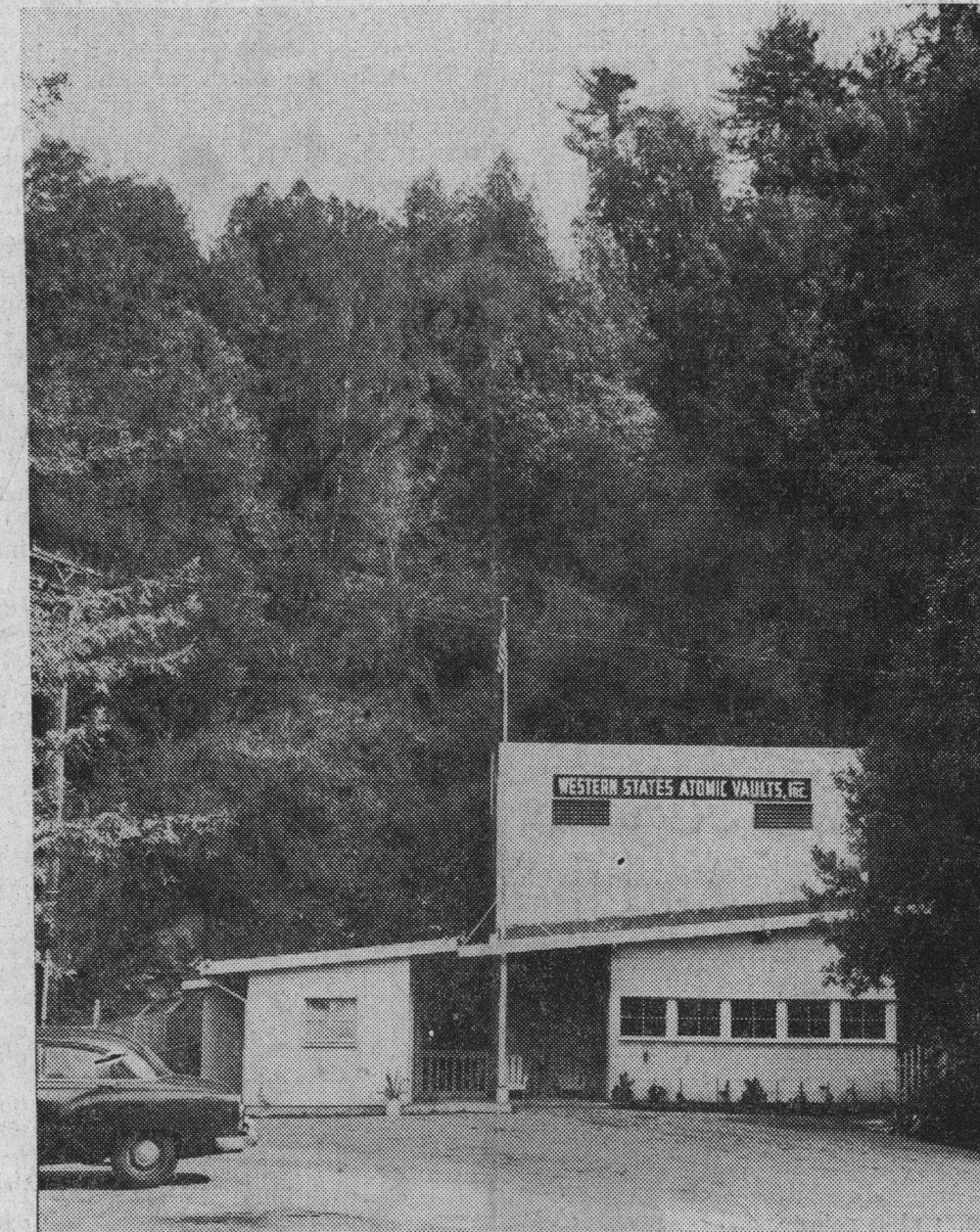
But it is a fact that about two-thirds of the way into the 241-foot tunnel, which has been made into two storage levels, there is a locked, grated door, with the notation:

**RESTRICTED
NO UNAUTHORIZED
PERSONNEL ALLOWED
PAST THIS POINT**

James P. Curl, chief guard at the vault, was happy, however, to show some of the other films stored in the vault which is under 92 feet of earth besides the thick concrete walls.

THERE WERE newspapers from all over the West and Honolulu; documents from the California Secretary of State; business records from such firms as General Electric, International Business Machines, Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.

“It would probably take a di-



BUILT INTO A HILL in the Santa Cruz Mountains is Western States Atomic Vault, an A-bomb-proof storage vault where thousands of microfilmed docu-

ments are kept against the possibility of atomic attack on the Bay Area. The vault, once a railroad tunnel, is now lined with three-foot concrete walls.

rect hit by an A-bomb to put us out of business,” Curl said cheerfully, adding, “and nobody’s going to waste one on these hills.”

KAUFMAN NOTED that the storage vault is not designed solely for protection against an atomic attack.

“It gives industries a copy of their records in case of fire or

flood. For instance, if Marysville and Yuba City would have had their records down here last year (the vault opened in 1953) they would have been able to get them copied fully within 24 hours.”

He cited the case of one Berkeley plastics firm which had sent its records on film to the vault only two weeks before a \$250,000

fire burned the plant to the ground.

“**THEY WERE** able to resume business almost immediately,” Kaufman said.

The machine that makes this possible is a Rube Goldberg-like contraption called the Xerograph. Worth almost \$100,000, it is the only one of its type in commercial use west of Chicago. It can enlarge and reproduce



UNDER GUARD are the documents in the vault in the Santa Cruz Mountains, one of only two in the country. Here guard James Curl takes a box of microfilm from its file to be reproduced for study.

microfilm onto paper at the rate of 20 feet a minute.

Within a few hours, at the most, the complete business records of an industry or corporation—or an arm of the Defense Department—can be brought up to viewing size as a permanent record.

WESTERN STATES Atomic Storage Vaults has its general

offices here at 55 New Montgomery-st.

As to the need for a storage system like this—which is one of two in the United States—Kaufman says:

“God grant that we will never have to know the effects of an atomic attack. But the possibility is still hanging over us, and we must be prepared.”

It’s not a happy thought, but that’s the way it is, in 1957.