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Sentinel

Health official paints grim picture of Santa Cruz under nuclear attack

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Even if nuclear bombs weren't dropped directly on this county in a nuclear war, the effects from bombs dropped elsewhere would cause death and destruction here, according to County Health Officer George Wolfe.

A report by Wolfe on the local medical consequences of a nuclear war went to the county Board of Supervisors today. The report, appearing on the consent agenda, was accepted in a 4-1 vote, with Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. opposed.

The report assumes that this county escapes a direct nuclear explosion and describes the local effects from 20-megaton bombs hitting San Francisco and San Jose and from one-megaton bombs exploding over Moss Landing and Fort Ord.

It further assumes that the blasts would

occur at 1,000 yards above the ground on a clear, sunny afternoon in autumn.

The effects of such a nuclear bombardment, according to Wolfe, would be as follows:

- The blasts over San Francisco and San Jose would immediately kill all living things within a seven-mile radius.

- The blast in San Jose would cause fire storms that would ignite the forests well into this county.

- The blast over Moss Landing would send a blast wave which would reach Watsonville, killing 4,000-plus people (10 percent of the population) and injuring over 20,000 (60 percent of the population.)

- The injured from Watsonville would overwhelm the county's hospitals and evacuation of patients to other areas would be impossible.

- Persons for a distance of 40 miles from the blast who glanced at the fireball would immediately be blinded.

- The Moss Landing blast would create an earthquake-like tremor that might produce a tsunami (giant wave) heading toward Capitola and Santa Cruz.

Wolfe's report goes on to describe the disorder that would arise in the days following the blasts:

- The county would have many dead and injured, possible wave damage and would be cut off from outside help.

- The hospitals and medical care systems would be overwhelmed and many of the medical personnel would have been killed or injured.

- Fire and police personnel would be overwhelmed by fires and by an injured and anxious population.

- Survivors from San Jose and San Francisco would come rushing to this area.

- The county would be without power and soon would run out of food, water, medicines, gasoline and other necessities.

Public health problems would occur due to these shortages and the inability to adequately dispose of the dead.

- Civil disorder would occur.

- We would be unable to get any help or supplies from other areas, perhaps for years.

"If winds were adverse, radioactive fallout from the San Francisco blast could kill up to 90 percent of our population and leave the area uninhabitable for years to come."

Wolfe states that he disagrees with the crisis relocation planning advocated by the federal government. If federal officials are correct and there's sufficient time to bring outsiders to this county before a blast, Wolfe points out that serious public health and medical problems would occur with the overcrowded conditions.

The county health officer concludes his report in part by stating, "As with any disease for which there is no adequate medical response, prevention is the only answer"

The report came up later in the morning as supervisors discussed the draft disaster-preparedness tabloid the county is putting together for distribution to citizens.

With Moore again opposed, supervisors agreed to add Wolfe's concluding remarks to the section on war-caused disasters along with the following statement:

"In case of a war-caused disaster, refer to sections on common emergencies and earthquakes. There is, however, no way to effectively plan for emergencies caused by nuclear war."

Board members agreed not to make a final decision on what to say about nuclear war until next week when they again take up the tabloid.