

# How They're Planning For The Unthinkable

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Sheriff's Lt. Bill Plageman, emergency coordinator for the county Office of Emergency Services, is midway through explaining how Crisis Relocation Planning would affect Santa Cruz when he begins to ponder its more macabre aspects.

"I mean, how is this plan going to work?" Plageman asks rhetorically of the government's ambitious civil defense strategy, which would relocate almost 600,000 people from neighboring counties to Santa Cruz in case of nuclear war.

"Does this mean Elks are going to take in Elks? And what about my dog? I'm not going to leave my dog behind in a nuclear war."

He pauses, then adds apologetically, "I shouldn't be laughing. But I'm a practical man and the notion of surviving a nuclear war...that's kind of far-out — isn't it?" "I'm laughing because if I weren't I'd be crying."

Laughter and pathos, life and death. Thinking the unthinkable. The lines between them grow faint when Crisis Relocation Planning.

The black humor has not been lost on

county supervisors, who last month voted 4-1 not to participate in the program.

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First proposed by President Carter, CRP calls for evacuating the population of the nation's high risk areas into supposedly unendangered "host areas" in times of international crisis which could escalate into nuclear war.

A pamphlet entitled "Questions and Answers on Crisis Relocation Planning," issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1980, states: "Because a distance of as little as 10 miles will remove people from the heat and blast effects of a nuclear explosion, FEMA feels it prudent to develop plans to relocate high risk area populations."

(The publication includes such questions as "Can our economy be protected against nuclear attack?")

Santa Cruz was identified as a host area last year by FEMA and would accommodate 3.08 relocatees from Santa Clara and San Mateo counties per existing resident. Monterey, Stanislaus and San Benito counties would host the rest of the Bay area.

Santa Cruz's share, based on the latest state Department of Finance figures, would be 589,234 persons — a situation which brings grim irony to the traditional rivalry between local residents and "valleys." (Average daily tourist attendance in Santa Cruz is 9,000 persons, according to the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.)

That's quite a lot of guest rooms. Where would they stay?

Toward answering this question FEMA dispatched a crew of engineers last summer to Santa Cruz — and other host areas — to survey every public and commercial building with more than 400 square feet of space.

Data on "upgradeable shelters" was compiled into computer printouts stored in the Office of Emergency Services in the basement of the county government center.

Structures would serve as fallout shelters, as opposed to shelters from heat and blast, the popularly-known "bomb shelters" of yesteryear.

Fallout shelters are necessary to protect people from radioactive particles which spread, depending on wind pat-

terns, when an atomic device explodes. Upon detonation the lethal particles are drawn up into a cloud and spread over the land "not unlike the dust when Mount St. Helens erupted," notes Plageman, who receives daily wind pattern reports from the National Weather Advisory.

The carcinogen effects of gamma radiation are considered by many to be more dangerous than the actual blast of the explosion.

State Office of Emergency Services officials maintain people need stay in shelter for only two weeks — maximum — before they would be able to return home, should a war occur.

"Theoretically, the plan is good, based on the success of evacuation of large numbers of people from the Gulf Coast during a hurricane," noted Plageman. "But local planners tend to be more practical and the actual movement of that many people into an area minimally prepared for them is staggering."

Nevertheless, this year California began developing plans for relocating its 24 million inhabitants into small towns and rural areas such as Santa Cruz.

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## PLANNING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE

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Relocation is based on the premise that there will be a period of tension lasting from three to 10 days prior to an attack, according to Loren Fields, director of the Nuclear Civil Protection division of the state Office of Emergency Services.

The Defense Department has told Congress that "they think our surveillance system will permit us to see if the Soviets are evacuating their cities," Fields said. (The Soviet Union has well-developed evacuation plans which include regular civilian drills.)

Relocation numbers are only estimates, Fields says. While specific plans are being drawn up for Southern California, Bay Area planning will not begin until next fiscal year.

The Bay area has several probable nuclear targets. The highest risk areas are, according to Fields, military counterforce bases, such as Strategic Air Command bases and nuclear submarine bases. The closest of these include Mare Island Naval Shipyard near Vallejo, which services nuclear submarines; the Moffett Field Naval Air Station near Sunnyvale and Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield.

Then come other military bases, such as Fort Ord in Monterey, and then "industrial-economic complexes," large cities with a population of more than 50,000.

The latter would include "virtually all of the urbanized area of Santa Clara County to the south of San Jose and not as far as Morgan Hill," Fields said.

Relocation planning has received its biggest push under President Reagan, who has proposed spending \$252 million on it next year. It amounts to \$1.10 per person per year over seven years — a total cost of \$5.3 billion.

Fields supports the program.

Besides minimizing the impact of bombings and radiation, the existence of the plan could protect the U.S. against blackmail if the Soviet Union suddenly mobilized and evacuated its own people, Fields contended.

He feels there is no contradiction between civil defense planning and anti-war activism. "Those are separate issues and you can support both."

He concludes:

"There is no question there are going to be survivors in a nuclear war. It's not going to be the end of the human race or even of civilization."

Dr. Robert Keet, chairman of the Monterey

Bay chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, disagrees.

"Ultimately, we will all die, if not for blast, then from radiation," says the Aptos internist.

Keet notes that Santa Cruz is in the direct path of the prevailing winds from San Francisco, making it a likely repository of radioactive fallout.

The group calls nuclear war "the last epidemic" and maintains planning for nuclear survival gives an illusion of safety. Instead, efforts should be directed towards preventing such a war.

Much of the debate centers on what would happen in a nuclear exchange.

Fields echoed government estimates that a distance of as little as seven miles would protect people from heat and blast.

His estimate is based on the explosion of a single one-megaton bomb, which has the explosion power of one million tons of TNT — about 70 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

The largest weapon in the U.S. and Soviet arsenal is 20 megatons.

FEMA believes 80 to 90 percent of the American people could survive if crisis relocation planning were implemented. Citizens need stay only as long as two weeks in shelter to protect them from fallout. Many areas would not suffer from fallout at all, according to Fields.

"Radioactivity from nuclear weapons decays at a fast rate," says Fields. "And the federal government has placed literally tens of hundreds of radiation detection devices in cities across the country."

But even 80 percent survival means that 40 million people would die.

"And it's hard to imagine a nuclear war with only one bomb, especially as missiles can carry as many as four to 16 bombs," Keet argues.

Physicians for Social Responsibility — which has 90 members locally — paints a grim picture of the consequences of nuclear war.

If a one-megaton bomb were dropped on San Jose, those as far away as 30 miles would suffer blindness and varying degrees of retinal burning from looking at the flash, Keets said.

Such an air burst would kill 780,000 persons — 22 percent of the total Bay area population — and seriously injure 382,000 for total casualties of 33 percent of the total population.

Everything within 1.7 miles of the blast

would disappear into a crater 20 stories deep. Of those three miles away, half would die within seconds from the blast and 50 percent would be injured. Tall buildings would collapse and fill the streets with debris.

If it were a ground-detonated burst, Santa Cruz residents would be bombarded with 500 rads of radiation, depending on the wind. Half the unprotected population would die, Keet estimated.

If a 15-megaton bomb were dropped on San Jose (or Fort Ord, in many ways a more likely target), wood frame buildings in Santa Cruz would buckle and fall and fires would break out all the way to the coast.

This is the scenerio of Dr. H. Jack Geiger, PSR member and Professor of Community Medicine at City College of New York, for if a 15-megaton bomb were exploded in San Francisco:

"In the seconds following detonation, the bomb would create a huge fireball with temperatures of 20 to 30 million degrees Fahrenheit. Anyone even glancing at the fireball from as far away as 35 miles would be blinded by retinal burning. Tens of thousands of people on the side of the city closest to the blast would suffer third degree burns."

"The shock wave created by the explosion would cause skull fractures, ruptured lungs, and crushing injuries to the chest. There would be broken backs, deep lacerations from flying debris and massive hemorrhaging. Even at 11 or 12 miles from ground zero, the overpressure would be great enough to turn an ordinary window to a lethal weapon as thousands of pieces of glass exploded at 100 miles per hour.

"These injuries do not include the many who would be killed by random spontaneous fires fueled by gasoline stations, natural gas lines, and oil storage tanks. The fires would coalesce into a firestorm burning the city and its surroundings for six to eight hours. With temperatures as great as 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit, anyone in a shelter would be dry roasted, as in a crematorium. Others would be asphyxiated as the fire sucked oxygen out of their shelters.

"In an attack on any city the injured could expect little in the way of medical care. The number of burn victims in just one city would exceed the number of intensive care beds in all the hospitals in the United States."