

Only 2 Public Fallout Shelters In County

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Limited nuclear war, selective strikes and nuclear option for the President - all of these concepts have been discussed in public recently by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Nuclear war, limited or otherwise is a frightening possibility in any event and raises questions regarding civil defense preparations, a subject that has been out of the spotlight since the early '60s.

A check with Lee Vernon, county civil defense chief, the California Office of Emergency Services and the regional office of the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (ACPA) revealed these facts:

—While the residents of the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville would be housed in public fallout shelters, those living in the unincorporated areas of the county would be expected to provide private shelters for themselves.

—In the basement of the county center is the largest emergency operations center (33,000 square feet) of any local government in the country;

—With a severe earthquake, there is a possibility that the Loch Lomond Dam would rupture, forcing the evacuation of some 15,000 persons in the San Lorenzo River Valley;

—In the event of a nuclear attack, or an earthquake in which the county is not severely damaged, local officials would be expected to care for an estimated 200,000 refugees from San Francisco and San Jose.

—The federal government is studying the possibility of "crisis relocation" during a period of international tension, in which non-essential workers would be moved from target area cities to "hast areas."

Vernon explained that due to budget restrictions and a political climate that does not put a high priority on civil defense, he has been unable to build fallout shelters for the county's unincorporated areas. He added that through mailings of literature and lecture tours he has repeatedly warned citizens in these areas of the need for protection and urged them to build their own shelters. Although some private shelters have been constructed, he said, far more need to be built. He blamed the gap on the public's unwillingness to think about the unpleasant subject of nuclear war.

The City of Santa Cruz has 16 public fallout shelters that, according to Vernon, will provide a moderate to high degree of fallout protection. There are no "blast shelters" - which have thick concrete walls and can provide protection against an almost direct hit - in

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the county. Vernon explained that he and other officials had determined that these would not be necessary since Santa Cruz has neither a large population nor a major military base and is not expected to be a target area.

The civil defense planning for the county, Vernon commented, centers around providing fallout shelters for the residents of Santa Cruz and Watsonville, and preparing "mass care facilities" for an estimated 200,000 refugees that would pour into the county should the Bay Area be hit by a nuclear blast.

The mass care facilities would be located in schools, hotels and other large buildings and would provide food and shelter for evacuees. The fallout shelters in the cities, which are now mostly unprepared basements of apartment houses and other large buildings, would in time of emergency be secured with sandbags supplied by the county public works department and stocked with food obtained from supermarkets.

The county center would be the largest shelter, the civil defense chief stated, housing over 14,000 people in the central portions of the upper five stories. The basement of the building would become the county's emergency operations center and would be sealed off with only 400 government officials and some other persons allowed inside.

Vernon is very proud of the county's emergency center. It includes dormitories, decon-

tamination room, cafeteria, special radio and telephone equipment, overhead projectors for displaying maps and charts containing names and phone numbers that delineate lines of authority. Visitors to the county building may see the special red signs outside basement offices that give the designation of the rooms in time of emergency.

Vernon said that civil defense planning centers around preparing for a nuclear attack in the belief that these plans could be used for natural disasters such as flood, fire and earthquake. He admitted that there was a much higher possibility of a natural disaster occurring rather than a nuclear attack.

A preliminary draft of the seismic safety element survey prepared by the county planning department notes that the county building "is located in a zone of high liquefaction potential, although it was designed to withstand high seismic stresses." This means that the filled land on which it is located would become liquid-like in an earthquake and cause greater damage to structures than if it were built on solid ground or bedrock. Another potential danger to the emergency operations center, according to the planning department's report, is from flooding in the event that either the Loch Lomond Dam or the Bay Street Reservoir should break in an earthquake.

The report states that while it is difficult to predict when

failure would occur, it would probably take a severe shock for the dams to be affected. In case there was flooding, Vernon said there were contingency plans for moving the emergency operations center to higher ground.

The county has faced three disasters since World War II. The 1948 forest fire which destroyed large areas in the north county, the 1955 flood of downtown Santa Cruz and the heavy snows in the winter of 1974. Some controversy surrounded the handling of the 1974 situation. Because of a delay by county officials in declaring the San Lorenzo

Valley a disaster area, the state legislature had to pass a special bill extending the deadline for applying for emergency aid.

Vernon said he had received very little information from the federal government on the crisis relocation plans. Frances Diaz, regional director of the DLPA said that the studies on the mass evacuation of non-essential workers from target areas had been conducted in 10 areas across the country. She said they were prompted by the finding that the Soviet Union and China had already prepared extensive similar plans for their cities.



Lee Vernon, county deputy director of civil defense sits in front of short wave radio equipment in the office of the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES). The room, located in the basement of the county government center, would be used by "ham" radio operators in a disaster.

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