



Alive after

But report paints a bleak picture for NZ survivors

By FRAN O'SULLIVAN

THE Planning Council's landmark study—New Zealand After Nuclear War—paints a grim picture of conditions in this country following a showdown between the super-powers.

Despite New Zealand's distance from the likely war theatre, the Northern Hemisphere, a major nuclear confrontation will have devastating global effects causing social chaos and breakdown in New Zealand.

If nuclear war occurs on the scale envisaged in the Planning Council's scenario, New Zealand will be left isolated, its links with the northern hemisphere smashed leaving the country without access to the vital imported supplies on which every sector depends.

While New Zealand will escape the more horrific consequences of nuclear war—where hundreds of millions of people in the Northern Hemisphere will die through bomb blast, radiation, disease and starvation—there will be fundamental disruption to our society.

Nuclear war is unlikely to result in immediate deaths in New Zealand because its distance from the Northern Hemisphere where the biggest population centres, the major combatants and the most likely targets are located, shields the country from the consequences of extreme radioactive fallout and a nuclear winter which will accompany a full-scale confrontation.

But the severing of links with the countries which produce the goods on which New Zealand depends such as medical supplies, electronic equipment and fuels will be devastating.

"This factor alone would mean a loss of virtually all medicines, and medical supplies and would very

hundreds of thousands of people," said Dr Green.

"And this confused and grief-stricken nation would be forced to carry on in the knowledge that millions of people in other countries were dead or dying and that little about the future was certain.

"Most of what we now take for granted would be lost or radically changed forever."

As Dr Green summarises, nuclear war would cause disruptions to practically every area of life in New Zealand.

But the extent of the local damage depends on the extent to which Australia is devastated during a nuclear confrontation.

The Planning Council says intelligence experts are confident that the three important joint USA-Australian military communications facilities in Australia at Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North-West Cape are directly targeted by Soviet missiles, but this does not preclude the additional use of an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) as a disabling act at the initiation of nuclear war.

AN EMP consists of a radiated pulse of electromagnetic energy produced from a region below a high altitude explosion.

Power cuts

Its speed and intensity are the most devastating characteristics, with an EMP rising to peak voltage in about five billionths of a second and lasting only one millionth of a second with a peak field strength of 30,000 to 90,000 volts.

The enormous instantaneous peak power density of an EMP causes a surge which damages or destroys sensitive electrical apparatus, tripping out transmission lines and burning out electronic circuits, as the energy emitted from an EMP is collected by any conducting antenna exposed to the pulse such as power and telephone lines, metal support towers, fence wires and radio antennas.

Two high altitude explosions over Australia would be sufficient to disable the communication bases and

soon begin to affect diabetics, asthmatics, people with heart disease and other chronic illness," says the council's principal researcher Wren Green.

Diseases which were the scourge of this society 40 years ago such as diphtheria, tetanus, measles, polio and TB would make a comeback as vaccines ran out.

Petrol shortage

Freedom of movement would be savagely curtailed as diesel and aviation fuel ran out. A shortage of petrol would mean only a small proportion of the cars currently on the road could be used.

As these broke down, it would become increasingly difficult to repair them as parts like batteries, spark plugs and tyres became worn out.

On the communications front, manual telephone exchanges, typewriters and printing presses would replace import dependent electronic telephones, typewriters, computers and presses.

Without access to export markets, thousands would quickly become unemployed—up to 40% of the population.

"As happens now, the unemployed would lose their sense of purpose and identity, only this would apply to

would be grim, "but I believe New Zealanders are survivors and everything points to us doing just that.

"There has been a lot of exaggeration about what would happen. "personally I don't see us being anywhere near the action.

"And even if Australia was a target we should be well and truly mobilised by the time fallout started

'City among safest'

NEW Zealand — and Auckland in particular — would be among the world's safest spots in a nuclear war, civil defence chiefs claim.

And a bomb dropped as close as Australia would not mean the end of civilisation here, they said.

Under the Civil Defence Act, a well-organised civil defence would swing into action, with the Army, Navy and Air

Force working with police and fire departments.

Action

If communication with Wellington broke down, Civil Defence chief G G Elder would assume responsibility for all areas from Taupo north.

Fred Wood, civil defence controller for the North Shore said the results of a nuclear war

'We must not switch off'

THE most important message in the study is that prevention is better than cure.

This is the view of Christchurch political scientist Kevin Clements, who contributed to the report.

"Just because we have banned nuclear weapons here doesn't mean we should sit on our laurels. We haven't eliminated the possibility of nuclear war or the impact of nuclear winter on New Zealand."

Dr Clements believes New Zealanders are beginning to switch off from nuclear issues.

"There is this self-indulgent attitude that we have done it, so the rest of the world can learn from us."

There was also an isolationist tendency, he said.

"Some people here would just be prepared to pull the blinds down and say goodbye to the rest of the world."

In spite of the report's suggestion that New Zealand could pull through a nuclear winter, Dr Clements believes the psychological effects would be paralyzing.

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disrupt that country's economic activities. If such an explosion occurred 400km above south east Australia, New Zealand would be within range of the EMP with ensuing catastrophic effects, dramatically altering the picture of post-nuclear war New Zealand.

An EMP does not directly affect people unless they are in direct contact with conductors, but power supplies and communication would be lost at a particularly stressful time.

If an EMP affects New Zealand a total blackout will occur as the country's national grid system is unlikely to be able to withstand such a surge in voltage and current.

The report says it could take between 12-24 hours to restore minimal power to major centres — sufficient to run sewage treatment, water supply plants and street lighting; and it could take at least a year for the electricity system to meet even half the current demand.

The voltage surge would destroy a wide variety of electrical and electronic components, making the country's telecommunications system at risk along with radio and television networks, computer networks, control equipment at oil refineries, and transport facilities.

While the council's worst case scenario is frightening enough, the council says, in any event, during the first few weeks after nuclear war, New Zealanders would experience a number of severe psychological pressures, particularly those associated with loss and fear.

Its report says the destruction of

so much humanity, the deaths of hundreds of millions of people in combatant countries and the abrupt loss of ties with people in other countries would overwhelm many with traumatic feelings of loss and dislocation.

The survival of relatives in the Northern Hemisphere would be unknown and people would not be certain that New Zealand was not a nuclear target.

Fear of radioactive fallout and uncertainty over what actions were appropriate would affect many New Zealanders.

Banking system

The banking system would probably be closed immediately to avoid a run on withdrawals as people tried to obtain cash and recover savings.

But closure of the banks at crisis time would increase people's anxieties considerably. The sudden loss of confidence in the financial system could cause a downward spiral into economic depression.

While there are likely to be large numbers of Northern Hemisphere refugees trying to escape from the effects of nuclear devastation, the council believes New Zealand's distance from the war theatre would prevent huge numbers arriving here.

It says the most serious threat for this country would be the arrival of refugees carrying infectious diseases bringing epidemic diseases absent in New Zealand such as plague, typhoid fever, cholera, typhus and leprosy.

If a nuclear war occurs, there could be up to 45,000 New Zealanders living outside the country who might try to get back home away from the conflict zone.

Such "trapped tourists" would place significant demands on the system straining housing, employment and social services.

The refugee issue poses an ethical dilemma of whether to let them into the country or turn them away to protect the lifestyle of New Zealanders.

The council's report underscores New Zealand's dependence on the outside world, the vulnerability of the technologies used in key systems, and the strong interdependency between sectors.

But while New Zealand has a chance in what has been dubbed the "unwinnable war" — across the Tasman the situation is more serious.

A study released last week by atmospheric scientist Barrie Pittock points up Australia's risk as a result of its joint defence communication installations.

Highest priority

In Beyond Darkness, Dr Pittock said 500 people working at the bases would be killed outright in the event of a direct attack with up to 10,000 others in nearby towns being killed depending on the size of the war-heads used and the prevailing weather conditions.