

Main concern social — grim scenario

Social rather than environmental problems would be New Zealand's main concern if there was a nuclear war, according to a Planning Council report released today.

The six-month study, New Zealand After Nuclear War, found that New Zealanders did not realise how different New Zealand's circumstances would be from those in the Northern Hemisphere.

"It's very important that people know that we would be likely to survive a nuclear war and therefore have to face some very grim prospects.

"In some ways, it's easier to do nothing about nuclear war, if you think the human race will be destroyed, than if you know you would have to face grim survival," council director Mr Peter Rankin said.

A 0,9,5.6A survey carried out by AGB:McNair for the council showed that nearly half the people questioned picked radioactive fallout as the most serious consequence of nuclear war for New Zealand. But Mr Rankin said weather patterns and the way radioactive fallout behaves meant New Zealand would only receive a minute percentage of the global fallout.

"Our message about radioactive fallout is by no means a new one, but we couldn't just assume that people fully understood the nature of radioactive fallout," principal researcher Dr Wren Green said in a statement.

While crop losses may occur, the effects of a nuclear winter would not be as extreme as in the Northern Hemisphere.

Fallout low

"Contrary to popular belief, there would be such a small amount of radioactive fallout reaching New Zealand, even if Australia were bombed, that there would be, say, a 1 per cent rise in the cases of cancer over several decades.

"This is not a large number, and they would not all be fatal," Dr Green said.

But the study does not downplay the catastrophic effects of a nuclear war to the Southern Hemisphere.

While there might not be immediate deaths in New Zealand, severe social chaos and breakdown would occur.

Dr Green said there would be no links with the Northern Hemisphere and no outside resources to call on.

"This factor alone would mean a loss of virtually all medicines and medical supplies, and would very soon begin to affect diabetics, asthmatics, people with heart disease and other chronic illnesses," he said.

No medicines

Diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, measles, polio and Tb would increase as vaccines ran out.

When diesel and aviation fuel ran out, there would be less freedom of movement, and only enough petrol to run a small proportion of the cars currently on the road.

Gradually, those cars would break down and it would become increasingly difficult to replace them as parts such as batteries, spark plugs and tyres wore out.

Technology from the manual days — such as typewriters, telephone exchanges and printing presses — would replace import-dependent electronic telephones, typewriters, computers and presses.

Job losses

Thousands of people — perhaps as many as 40 percent of the population — would lose jobs as exporting ceased.

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

"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." — NZPA



Mr Rankin