

Domina
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Nuke explosion would cripple economy

A NUCLEAR explosion over Australia would be enough to cripple much of the New Zealand economy in a split second and possibly force people into subsistence living, according to the Planning Council's report, New Zealand After Nuclear War.

An intense electromagnetic pulse would damage most electrical equipment and destroy sensitive parts of computers, knocking out communications, energy, banking and transport systems.

But the report says it is questionable whether it would be economically feasible to protect the entire communications system,

and knocks out most electrical equipment in line of sight.

The report says it is unlikely such a high altitude explosion would occur over New Zealand in a nuclear war.

But it is considered more likely to occur over southeast Australia as a disabling act at the start of a nuclear war.

An electromagnetic pulse would be devastating because of its speed and intensity, overwhelming ordinary protective devices such as surge diverters.

The pulse would cause a surge in the national power grid of up to three million volts. This would

result in a total blackout. Though some power could be restored within 24 hours it could take at least a year for the electricity system to meet even half the demand.

Most easily damaged would be very sensitive electronic items such as radios, stereos, washing machines, microprocessors, electronic ignition in cars and computers.

Telephone systems using solid-state switching systems are much more vulnerable than older equipment, the report says.

Valve equipment on old radios

is resistant to pulse effects, while battery powered radios, which were not attached to the mains, would probably be undamaged.

The report says the effect on the communications systems would be disastrous. Many of the computers and communications equipment of the Broadcasting Corporation, Telecom and most government departments including police and defence are not protected.

The amateur radio network would be less likely to be damaged and would be an important avenue of communication.

There would be massive disruption of energy supplies. The Motunui synfuel plant would stop and would not be able to be restarted because its electronic control system would be wrecked. The Marsden Point refinery would close.

Environment secretary Roger Blakeley invited the public yesterday to comment on the findings.

The public is invited to make submissions to the Ministry of Environment by November 27 about what study and action is needed.

□ Govt reacts, p 15