

MediaSearch Corporation Limited  
Private Bag, Wellington 1. New Zealand  
Tel. (04) 843-609  
Fax. [Intl +64] (04) 849-126

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## Aftermath of nuclear war

The basic plea in "New Zealand after Nuclear War," published by the New Zealand Planning Council, is that New Zealand should undertake some preparation in case there is a nuclear war. The authors, Wren Green, Tony Cairns, and Judith Wright, have done a thorough job in analysing the possible effects of nuclear war on New Zealand. In the end, this amounts to saying what the impact of nuclear war would be if it were to occur away from New Zealand. The authors do not indulge in scaremongering, but the account is nevertheless chilling.

In a survey conducted for their book, the authors found that many New Zealanders were concerned about the effects of radiation. Under various possibilities of nuclear war, New Zealand would not altogether escape an increase in radiation, and this would bring about a slight increase in the number of cases of cancer in the country; but the main effects on the country would not come about because of an increase in radiation. One of the devastating effects would be an electromagnetic pulse, a phenomenon associated with the explosion of a nuclear weapon and which would be likely to damage the electrical supply systems of the country, most of the equipment which uses some form of a microprocessor, and many other forms of electrical equipment connected to a power supply. Normal circuit-breakers would be useless against an electromagnetic pulse. An E.M.P. effect would have a profound impact on communications in an emergency. Battery radios would survive, although radio stations might not. New Zealand would almost certainly not be the target for an attack, but might be affected incidentally by an attack on Australia.

Probably more graphically than it has been said before, the Planning Council report emphasises the loss of import supplies. Because New Zealand is almost wholly reliant on imported pharmaceutical supplies, and the chances would seem to be high that these supplies would no longer be available, huge health problems would occur in the population of New Zealand and these could be multiplied by the arrival of refugees from the Northern Hemisphere.

The authors make the point frequently that New Zealand would be affected a great

deal less than many other countries, but temperatures in New Zealand would drop because of a nuclear winter. This would be the result of diverse environmental effects caused by widescale burning of cities, forests, and chemicals. The temperature drop in New Zealand would not be anything like as great as would occur in countries close to nuclear explosions. Although crops might be reduced, they could be expected to grow. New Zealanders would not starve after a nuclear war.

A further effect would come about because of the loss of New Zealand's export markets. The country's agriculture production would far exceed the needs of the population. This would bring about the collapse of the agricultural industry as it is now understood. The economy would probably become a subsistence one.

Most people prefer not to think about the possibilities raised in the Planning Council report. The authors want New Zealanders to debate some of the issues openly. Even if the authors are somewhat optimistic about the willingness of people to debate the subject, the report nevertheless raises the important question of whether the Government also should put the matter out of its mind. The authors make some sensible suggestions, such as the establishment of an administrative structure so that people would have reasonable information and necessary functions of government could be carried out at a time in which there might be little or no communication with the central Government.

The study also goes into such matters as the stockpiling of petrol and diesel and pharmaceutical supplies. Various measures to guard against the effects of E.M.P. are possible, even to the extent of always having one electrical power generating station in reserve. Cost is an inhibiting factor. The problems which arise in thinking about a nuclear war disaster are not entirely different from those to be found after other disasters. The extent to which New Zealand can prepare is a reasonable subject for discussion. But the planning should not be taken so seriously that the economy of the country becomes dramatically distorted to take account of a possibility that the world, including New Zealanders, fervently hopes will never arise.