

# THE DOMINION

SATURDAY

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## Mushroom cloud lining

**B**ADEN POWELL knew a thing or two about coping with wet wood and nuclear holocausts. Be prepared was the motto, although it may have been just his way of remembering his name. Always carry a dry box of matches and a packet of potassium iodide tablets.

There are other ways of coping with the horrors of the big sky fry. Anxious Americans can now buy a radiation warning receiver called Survivor. "Early knowledge of a radiological emergency can allow you the time to beat the traffic and avoid the panic," say the promoters. Advance warning is vital "to give you the edge" in leading your family to the shelter. And bolting the doors behind you?

What's more, the manufacturers kindly offer satisfaction guaranteed. If you do not get the security you feel you need, with your receiver plugged into a wall socket, then you can return it within 30 days for a full refund. If they drop the big one on day 31, and your box doesn't bleep, bad luck. The complaints department is in the third crater on the left.

Nuclear war poses a different set of consumer problems for New Zealanders. A Planning Council report has raised fears that a nuclear war would ruin the economy and the weekend.

Unable to export to the northern hemisphere, the country would quickly be awash with unwanted lamb carcasses and the unemployed. We are told that hundreds of thousands of people, deprived of work, would lose their sense of purpose and identity. Not only that . . . given an electromagnetic pulse, what we call an EMP in the post-holocaust business, stereos, micro-waves, washing machines and the electronic ignition in cars would be destroyed. A three million-volt pulse would pass through the national grid, blacking out the country and ruining television viewing.

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Nuclear war would play havoc with the finance sector. The computers of foreign exchange dealers would be out of action for a very long time. This would probably cause confusion about the value of our dollar and forex dealers could be expected to wander the streets aimlessly waiting for quotations from New York and Tokyo markets.

There is a danger here. Without purpose to their lives, and with the value of Brierley and Robert Jones shares plummeting due to uncertainty about their northern real estate, unemployed dealers and stockbrokers could form into dangerous street gangs smashing silent computer terminals and telex machines and stealing potted plants.

But every mushroom cloud has a silver lining. Wiping out the northern hemisphere and much of civilisation as we know it also offers the chance to wipe out our foreign debt. Our export earnings might be slashed but our debt mountain would also be reduced to rubble. Our standing amongst the OECD nations, slipping steadily for 20 years, would improve. If Australia was hit we could even achieve number one status.

A nuclear war would also improve our standing in a host of sports events, although in this case destroying Australia could have some unfortunate side effects. If they took out the Lucky Country, then we should also assume the worst: South Africa's number would be up as well. Then who would we play with? With Chile? General Pinochet strikes us as a sore loser.