

Nuclear aftermath planning sought

Now that the analysts have figured out what would happen to New Zealand if there is a nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere, they want decisions to be made about preparing for the circumstances they have foretold.

Regional meetings are being co-ordinated by the Ministry for the Environment at which local people and organisations will be able to make suggestions. The Christchurch one, in the Civic Regency on the evening of October 28, will be addressed by Dr Wren Green, the principal researcher and one of the authors of the report, "New Zealand After a Nuclear War."

Dr Green says a lot of the issues identified in the report need to be addressed very quickly. "We're past the talking stage," he says. "What's needed now is some serious planning."

The Government now wants to begin working towards the second phase of activities, and at the regional meetings people will be invited to say what that second phase ought to involve.

"It could go a number of different ways," says Dr Green, "and the government wants to know what people think should be done."

The Ministry for the Environment has put out a pamphlet outlining what it is calling for and what further study and action is needed.

Dr Green says it is trying to involve sectors of the community that would otherwise not be involved. As well as regional authorities, other important groups should be thinking about the implications of nuclear war. Manufacturers, for example, need to consider the enormous

By GARRY ARTHUR

implications of losing all trade with the Northern Hemisphere. Dr Green says Christchurch has to consider what it would do if the central Government could not cope. Mechanisms should be put in place for making decisions that would normally be made by central Government. What legislative changes are needed?

All of this planning should be based on the likelihood that New Zealand would survive a nuclear conflict between the super-Powers.

"It would be very different from anything we've known," says Dr Green. "We don't have much experience to draw on that would help us to cope. "It would be totally different from a natural disaster. Instead of things getting gradually better, they would get steadily worse. And there would be no outside help — we'd be very much alone."

Dr Green says the closest comparison would be the social and economic disruptions suffered by various Maori tribes last century consequent upon the wars and the alienation of Maori land.

He points out that 80 per cent of New Zealand's trade is with the Northern Hemisphere, so it is necessary to ask what is the future of all those sectors of the economy that we now take for granted. In publishing, for example, all of the printing equipment is imported and has imported electronic controls — how would it cope with breakdowns?

Dr Green predicts an immediate rise in unemployment to 40 or 50 per cent — three or four times the unemployment rate of the Great Depression — in a matter of weeks. He says there are obviously ways of employing more people in the rural sector, but that would not happen in a hurry. Rationing of petrol, medicines and chemicals would have to be planned for.

"Normally, central Government would make those decisions, but it might be impossible for them to do so. Because of the number of decisions they would have to make, and the implementation of them, the Government would not be able to cope. But at the local level it might be more feasible."

Dr Green says New Zealand does not have any contingency plans and the Ministry for the Environment is trying to point out the issues to be faced, what contingency plans are required and what problems we should be addressing.



Dr Wren Green, one of the report's authors.

tor's coping ability," he says. These are some of the subjects for follow-up submissions. Ways of reducing these vulnerabilities have to be devised — ways of overcoming the lack of planning, and such factors as the

substitution of imported medicines with locally produced ones, and the greater use of methanol, natural gas and recycled oil to replace imported fuels. Stand-by mechanical systems that would run longer than the "flashy stuff

we use now should also be planned.

"These are very important issues that need a great deal of careful thought," says Dr Green. "We need to make decisions too about stockpiling key minerals and chemicals."

Although the chance of nuclear war breaking out by accident is considered to be 10,000 to one, the United Nations estimate of the chance of a situation like the Cuban missile crisis building up through mistakes and misunderstandings is 20 to one.

"We've got to recognise that we must think about it as a possibility," says Dr Green, "because the consequences are so huge that we have just got to take it seriously. If the consequences were minor, we wouldn't need to worry."

He compares it to pouring huge amounts of money and effort into strengthening buildings because we know the consequences of an earthquake would be terrible, even though the likelihood is remote.

The Planning Council's report, "New Zealand After a Nuclear War," was based on the assumption that it was unlikely that New Zealand would be a nuclear target.

"It's more useful to assume that we would not be a target," Dr Green explains. "We can't plan for being a target because it would be all over for us, but we can plan for circumstances in which we are not a direct target of nuclear attack. Then we can see clearly what the consequences would be for a non-combatant country."

27/10/87
The Press
Christchurch