

# ARIZONA NEWSLETTER Doctors for Disaster Preparedness

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## A MEMORY HOLE AT THE NAS?

The long awaited, frequently cited book called The Medical Implications of Nuclear War ought to be an authoritative source: it is published, after all, by the prestigious Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science. It claims to present new and validated findings, an impression that was strongly supported by the press releases emanating from the symposium from which the book is derived. In actuality, many of the results were preliminary and controversial, and had undergone no peer review. Participants did not see other papers until they arrived in Washington, and little time was provided for discussion. A small steering committee made the major decisions about what subjects would be discussed and by whom. Well-known national spokesmen for Physicians for Social Responsibility were heavily represented on that committee.

### A I D S

The press was most interested in the "immunological impact of nuclear war." Greer and Rifkin compared the [reversible] immune deficiencies that might result from radiation exposure and other stressors to the problems experienced by AIDS patients. Given this analogy, the press concluded, in banner headlines, that "Nuclear War Causes AIDS!"

"No matter that the real AIDS is caused by a virus," chortled Lewis Thomas in the foreword. He was just overjoyed to get the media's attention. Greer appeared on television, and made no attempt to correct the misconception. In the DDP-PSR debate in Dallas, Dr. Wes Wallace repeated the refrain: "There is significant evidence that there will be a large presence of what is essentially AIDS among the survivors of nuclear war."

Of course, this irrational, sensationalist appeal to emotion is exactly what PSR members urge us to guard against, if the menace happens to be the real AIDS, the permanent, universally fatal, contagious kind.

### F I R E

The second highly important issue is fire. Ted A. Postol purported to show that thermal rather than blast effects would be the dominant cause of prompt casualties in a nuclear war. However, his proposed conflagration model is a big, controversial jump from the data concerning fire initiation and spread.

Postol's work is quoted by defense opponents who wish to demonstrate the futility of urban blast shelters. Indeed, the gruesome descriptions of corpses found in shelters in the firestorm areas of Hamburg and Dresden are accurate. But was the "well-organized German civil defense . . . totally ineffective in the intense firestorms"?

Postol states "I was unable to find any unambiguous data on survival rates within the region of mass fire at Hamburg." Also, "there are . . . personal reports of people who survived in . . . public bunkers. . . . However, the location of these bunkers in the fire zone and the numbers of people saved by them were not reported (p. 58)."

A. Broido in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists XIX(Mar):20-23, 1963, stated: "Official records show that more than 85 per cent of the 280,000 people in the firestorm area of Hamburg survived -- including practically all of the more than 50,000 who sought refuge in bunkers, covered trenches, and other nonbasement shelters." According to Hans Rumpf in The Bombing of Germany (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), "At first the casualties were overestimated by both sides, . . . but now at least Hamburg is one of the towns about which we know most in this respect." Other references, including the British analysis, are available.

It is unclear why Postol was "unable to find" these data. Perhaps there is a memory hole at his place of research.

## A L L H A Z A R D S B U T O N E ?

"All hazards planning does not mean all hazards but one," said FEMA Director Julius Becton, speaking at the first Emergency Management Issues Seminar held at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, MD, January 7-9, 1987.

Becton reaffirmed his conviction that civil defense is the most important of FEMA's responsibilities. He intends to enforce the 1981 amendment to the Federal Civil Defense Act, which provides that funds made available to the States may be used for natural disasters only to the extent that such use contributes to and does not detract from attack-related civil defense preparedness. The concept of the "Integrated Emergency Management System" had the effect of draining funds intended for protecting the population against nuclear attack into other, more politically popular endeavors.

The July, 1986 report of FEMA to the Congress revealed that only three States possess the composite of capabilities that would be essential in a postattack environment: State emergency plans, survivable control and communications facilities, and radiologic protection equipment and personnel. Only 9 states have electromagnetic pulse protection for their Emergency Broadcasting System. Only 14 states report having the trained personnel required to assess and control the exposure of State emergency workers to fallout. Radiologic protection information suitable for public distribution is out of date and in many instances out of print. The current state of civil readiness is unacceptably low (and probably overstated), and continues to deteriorate.

Becton's attempt to assemble all the Agency's critics was unprecedented. About 130 individuals from 70 organizations accepted his invitation to the Issues Seminar. (Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Union of Concerned Scientists were invited, but did not attend.) Participants made many recommendations, including the following: public training in medical self-help; systematic medical stockpiling; exercises to test Emergency Medical Services response to accidents involving radiation exposure; modernized instruments for radiation detection; a revival of civil defense research; and better "marketing" of the concept of civil defense to a frequently misinformed public.

Congress expresses its values in terms of dollars and cents, and funding is not expected to improve. The civil defense budget for 1987 will be about \$139 million (about \$0.61 per capita, not all of which is actually spent on attack preparedness), compared with \$178 million in 1985 (about \$0.79 per capita). We spend \$200 million per year to enforce the 55 mph speed limit.

DDP was represented by Drs. Clay Huntley of Maryland and Jane Orient of Tucson.

## F U E H R E R B U N K E R S ?

In case the Soviets missed the article published some years ago, the National Enquirer, Dec 16, 1986, described the blast shelter for about 6500 important persons located at Mount Weather, Virginia. Although one supposedly needs a special invitation for admission, it is unlikely that persons assigned to report there actually would show up in the event of a nuclear war. Because the Soviets know the exact location, the combat life expectancy of the shelter is about 20 minutes, according to a scientist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. A serious program would provide multiple dispersed shelters at secret locations. In fact, even NETC does not have a stockpile of supplies, although there are old signs posted for "fallout shelter."

If the National Enquirer practiced balanced reporting, the article would have mentioned the fact that the Soviet Union has built between 800 and 1500 elaborate complexes that could serve as Fuehrer bunkers for up to 175,000 key personnel.

Although FEMA has recently declared its intention to provide for continuity of the government and the protection of public records in the event of nuclear war, at the present time the US government no longer has the powers that have traditionally been invoked in time of national emergency. For the first time in 40 years, there is no standby rationing authority, and stockpiling has been in limbo for a decade, commented Julius Becton at the January Issues Seminar.