

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

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## A society in ruins

New Zealand's population would survive a nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere, a report from the Planning Council says. But society would be devastated.

By Richard Ninness

The first phase in making New Zealand less vulnerable to the effects of a nuclear war was completed last week with the publication New Zealand after Nuclear War from the New Zealand Planning Council.

"Once we acknowledge that it could happen then we strengthen our determination to work to prevent that," said Mr Phil Goff who commissioned the report as Minister for the Environment.

"We are right on the edge of science fiction."

The report establishes a framework from which New Zealand can plan to meet such a disaster.

Mr Goff expects public submissions to the Ministry of Environment to indicate where more research is needed.

He said the public must be involved.

"We could have the best plans in the world, but if the public had been kept in the dark ... then we would have a major problem."

The necessity of research and public knowledge has been highlighted by the report which shows the direct consequences of a nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere — the effects of radiation and a "nuclear winter" — would be comparatively negligible in New Zealand. The country

would receive enough radiation to increase long-term cases of cancer and the climate would be cooled a little for the first year.

New Zealanders would survive. But the society would be devastated. The "worst case" scenario is that an EMP (electromagnetic pulse created by a high-altitude nuclear detonation) would affect New Zealand indirectly through Australia being targeted.

This would immediately knock-out New Zealand's energy, communication and transport systems. Nearly all computers would be made useless. New Zealand would be in the dark, literally, reliant on older, more resilient equipment and batteries for immediate communication.

Some electricity could be restored. After a day sewerage and water plants might operate.

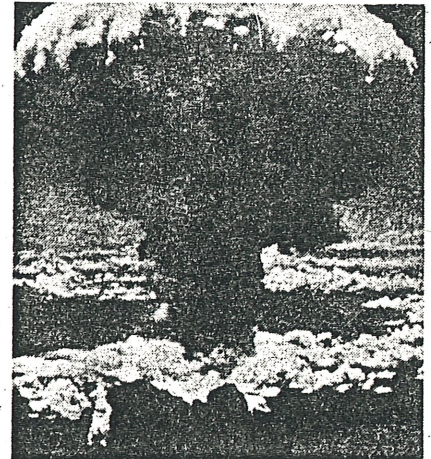
But the scale of disruption is difficult to imagine.

Most cars would not run. Money would not be available through a banking system. Food would be a priority and most shops would be incapable, if willing, to sell anything.

Information, which is vital in order for people to be able to make decisions, would be scarce.

Without an EMP New Zealand would be better off.

Society would have longer to adjust to the



changes that would have to be made as systems broke down.

The study highlights New Zealand's complete dependence on foreign technology.

The most disturbing aspect is a virtual 100 per cent dependence on imported drugs. The report suggests we would return to the health standards of 50 years ago.

"We need to look at what we import, we need to look at whether there are substitutes available in New Zealand. Whether even at some expense...we could convert some of our redundant industries into producing the pharmaceuticals and indeed other goods we may need," Mr Goff said.

"My belief is that there can be an alternative to the complete breakdown of society."

— Sopac.