

G. 21/8/84
Civil defence planners line up
old containers as medical stores

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By Andrew Veitch,
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The Department of Health is considering buying about 2,000 second-hand freight containers to store medical supplies for a nuclear attack.

The confidential proposals, drawn up by emergency planning officers and leaked to the Guardian, would cost the National Health Service an estimated £1.7 million.

The containers, the sort seen piled in dockyards, could be packed with stretchers, bedding and bandages from the DHSS stockpile and distributed to the health regions, says the report.

The supplies, described by officers as obsolete but in excellent condition, are stored in five depots by the Department of the Environment's Property Services Agency.

It is unrealistic to believe the stores could be distributed in the tense period the Government assumes would precede an attack, says the report. Sending them throughout the country could "add credence" to the NHS civil defence plans.

DHSS planners have been told to work on the assumption that there will be a seven-day warning of attack, and

that it should be able to put plans into action within 48 hours.

The 39-page report was drawn up by a team of emergency planning officers led by Mr John Barnes of South-east and South-west Thames, and including the North-east Thames officer, Air Commodore J. G. Greenhill. It was submitted to the department earlier this year. The DHSS has warned that regions which refuse to take their share of the stockpile will have their funds cut.

Mr Barnes said yesterday: "This is an internal study for health emergency planning officers. The containers are one option and they have to be evaluated in detail. The department has been deadly quiet about the whole thing but I believe they are having negotiations with the PSA."

The wider the supplies were spread, the greater chance there was that some might survive an attack. "No one's got a crystal ball to tell where to put them. It depends on what is in the mind of an aggressor."

A British Medical Association report has said a nuclear attack would be so devastating that NHS plans were pointless.

A BMA spokesman said yesterday: "How would you overcome the fact that in certain areas these stocks would be wiped out? How would you get them into the right areas and who would manage the stockpiles? Unless it was an isolated attack or an accident, an attack would leave no chain of command."

The civil defence report envisages each of the 14 English regions taking up to 156 containers. A typical container with a capacity of about 1,200 cubic ft would hold 1,000 blankets, 100 stretchers, 20 rope lashings, 100 water bottles, three stoves, and 100 pillows. They would also have chloroform inhalers, syringes and forceps and would cost about £800 each.

The container could be stored at hospitals where administrators would take responsibility, military bases, or by local authorities and "painted to blend with surroundings."

Mr Bob Jones, national officer of the National Union of Public Employees, said yesterday: "The plan is ludicrous. Who is going to hold the keys? What happens if the administrator is killed? There is no way the NHS can provide a hospital service in the aftermath of nuclear war."

'PIT BURIALS' FOR BOMB VICTIMS

Secret plans have been drawn up to dispose of dead bodies down disused mines in the event of a nuclear war, a councillor in Blith Valley, Northumberland, claimed yesterday. Councillor Ron Campbell said yesterday: "I have seen a secret report which says that the victims of a nuclear holocaust will be buried down disused mines at Harley, New Delaval and Isabella Alliance."

Last week a Northumberland County Council committee was told the burial of bodies at sea was one way of disposing of victims of a nuclear war. This method, however, was discounted as fuel for ships would be scarce, following a nuclear attack.

Civil defence preparations

The BBC film *Threads*, which depicted the scenario leading up to nuclear war and its aftermath, involving the destruction of Sheffield, raises important issues on civil defence and the behaviour of the population under war conditions.

The film made it clear that the chief executive of Sheffield and his chief officers, who had to man the wartime headquarters, were either untrained or had received little training in civil defence organisation. However, the film did not state that Sheffield is a nuclear free zone and that plans had not been updated since 1981.

It was this lack of training and preplanning which came over so vividly in the film.

Nor was there any reference in the film to any of the many excellent voluntary organisations who undertake training to assist in such situations.

Unfortunately the worst tendencies of human behaviour were depicted, on the part of citizens and officials alike but it is not more likely that survivors would band together in a humanitarian manner to help themselves and others to recover the threads of society?

It was interesting to note that areas outside Sheffield were undamaged and with proper training and organisation help could be given to the survivors.

As Dr Philip Steadman said in the discussion following the film, it would be immoral to do nothing to help survivors, or that nothing could be done — but it should be asked: "Are we as a nation doing enough?"

H. A. Tinsley,
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Nuclear-free' councils hope to know where they stand next week

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G.H.

By FRANCES HORSBURGH
Local Government Correspondent

REPRESENTATIVES of the 155 councils throughout the United Kingdom which have declared themselves "nuclear-free zones" are to hear legal opinion next week on their position in relation to the Government's latest delines on civil defence.

The councils' legal arguments are based on the claim that the planning assumptions issued by the Government's last month are not detailed enough to form an adequate basis for civil defence measures they are legally required to take.

Dumbarton's district planning convenor Councillor Ian Leitch, a

member of the steering committee of the Association of Nuclear Free Zones Councils, said yesterday authorities needed to know much more about the assumed attack patterns and the local effects of a nuclear strike.

Councillor Leitch said: "If we are to judge what to do we must have a reasonable assumption of what the Government expects to happen. However, I believe the Government will do everything in its power not to give realistic assumptions, because if it did, the public would be aware that their street or community would be destroyed."

The new civil defence regulations were clearly binding

in law, he added, but counsel's opinion would give guidance on what action was necessary from the Government to make it possible for councils to comply.

A special working party, of which Councillor Leitch is a member, is to meet next week possibly in London, to consider the planning assumptions in detail and also, it hopes, to hear legal advice. The full association, which has more than 24 Scottish members, will meet in October to co-ordinate strategy.

Meanwhile members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' protective services committee decided in Edinburgh yesterday to postpone making a

response to the latest Scottish Office consolidated circular of guidance containing the planning assumptions until November, when a survey of councils' views will have been completed.

Members of Nalگو, the local government union, employed by Labour-controlled Central Regional Council, are to be given an assurance that they will not be penalised if they refuse to take part in civil defence activities.

The pledge follows an approach by the Nalگو branch to ensure that no employees would be forced to become involved in civil defence duties following two Home Office circulars on civil defence regulations.