

Civil defence guide ignores nuclear winter

By Richard Norton-Taylor and Rosemary Collins

THREE Government departments yesterday released detailed guidance on civil defence after a nuclear attack, without referring to recent studies that even a limited exchange could lead to the "nuclear winter."

The Home Office, which repeats the traditional advice that the best protection is to stay at home, says in its guidance to local emergency planning officers: "The suggestion that the use of nuclear weapons might have long-term physical effects is long lives in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear attack." It might be safe to emerge from a shelter 48

hours after an attack.

Similar advice is given in a Ministry of Agriculture pamphlet which says that pigs and poultry can survive for two days without water, and cattle and sheep for four or five days.

Farmers should use sheets of polythene to protect their cattle and water supplies, and shovel earth into their lofts to minimise the effects of nuclear war.

The ministry has printed 15,000 copies of the document after two years' research and it replaces advice published in 1958, although little has changed. In the old booklet farmers were advised to protect their cattle with sheets of tarpaulin.

The third initiative which came out of Whitehall yesterday was given a guarded welcome by the British Medical Association.

Dr John Dawson, co-author of the BMA's own nuclear war report, said that in its consultative paper sent to health authorities, the Department of Health and Social Security had made a more honest attempt to recognise the problems and the important differences between conventional and nuclear attacks.

It says health authorities should plan for a rapid dispersal of supplies and equipment and that staff should be trained to work in primitive conditions. It does not make the point that hospital

equipment — X-ray machines, for example — are increasingly built into hospitals.

As to who should be regarded as worthy of treatment, it suggests only "that this should be up to the sole discretion" of the secretary of state.

The DHSS circular adds: "With massive numbers of casualties, a reduction in the health facilities available, disorganised transport and poor communications it cannot be expected that anything approaching peacetime standards of care would be available to all who required it." The Home Office emphasises the need for "flexible"

arrangements on the training of civil defence volunteers. It urges emergency planning officers to look for suitable communal shelters.

But it said yesterday that its new version of the widely criticised Protect and Survive pamphlet is not ready, nor was its advice on the effect of chemical weapons.

The Ministry of Agriculture leaflet, described by Mr John Home-Robertson, Labour's agriculture spokesman as "high-octane drive", says that farmers should make sure that any workers using noisy machinery on the day of nuclear attack are told that the whistle or gong has sounded, as otherwise they might not hear it.

"People many miles away might see the flash, hear the explosion or see the mushroom-shaped cloud. In that case, even if no other warning had been given, it should be assumed that radioactive fallout might arrive."

Farmers should wash and peel any fruit and vegetables covered with radioactive dust before eating them, and feed "cereal crops which have been badly affected by radiation only to livestock." Mr John Home-Robertson said yesterday that it was outrageous to publish the leaflet only weeks before the international Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment considers the nuclear winter thesis.

T. 19/6/85
Civil defence proposals inadequate, doctors say

By Peter Evans
 Home Affairs Correspondent

The Government's plans for civil defence, released last week, are inadequate for nuclear warfare, the Medical Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons said yesterday.

Dr Peter Sims, a family doctor, who is chairman of the campaign's working group on civil defence, said that a Department of Health and Social Security circular failed to meet the criticism of the British Medical Association that even a one-megaton nuclear bomb would overwhelm the National Health Service.

The circular failed to explain, he said, how the centralized health services needed in conventional war could quickly change to the dispersed community services required in a nuclear war.

"Any nuclear attack would render most hospitals useless, the loss of power, transport, water and communications

The reluctance of the DHSS to take those different requirements seriously only reinforced the view of many doctors that the issue was fudged because there were no plans for a nuclear scenario, Dr Sims said.

"Instead they concentrate on bureaucratic changes which no health administrator would be able to carry out after a nuclear attack. No one is likely to be concerned with health authority hierarchies when people are dead, burned, dying and traumatized."

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Early warning

Just in case the rate demand isn't sufficiently alarming to Barrow-in-Furness residents, the latest bills are accompanied by a leaflet on what to do if an accident occurs in one of the three Trident nuclear subs being built in the town's Vickers shipyard. "The first warning will be given by the Vickers Shipyard 'hooter' . . . Go indoors . . . switch on your radio/TV, tune to Radio Furness." Those living near the yard may have to take potassium iodate tablets, which according to Prof Joseph Rotblat, who worked on the first atom-bomb test, will help absorb any iodine 131 in the air before it attacks the thyroid gland. Yesterday a remarkably frank senior council official told me Barrow was a cul-de-sac off the M6 - "You come in alive and you go out dead."