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# Publication would conflict

## with advice to stay put

# Studies showing areas vulnerable to nuclear war kept secret

**Richard Norton-Taylor**

A proposal by Home Office scientists to release Whitehall files on which parts of the country would be most vulnerable to a nuclear attack has been rejected by the Government.

Ministers argue that if the files were published there would be no area of Britain which would be safer than any other and hence their advice to stay put in the event of an impending attack — would lack credibility.

The fact that Home Office scientists were drawing up a list of "threatened areas" was revealed in a Granada TV World Action programme on Monday.

Documents from a private seminar of Whitehall scientific advisers held at the University of Hull in 1980 on the theme "Post-Attack Society" confirm the initiative.

Mr John Clayton, then a senior Home Office scientist, spoke at the seminar: "We are going to make a broader assessment than we have done in the past. Technically, we are able to do that now, and one of the things we had to do in the assessment was to make a judgment as to which of the most threatened areas of the country."

It was those areas which would depend on what the military targets were perceived to be. Mr Clayton's colleagues in the Ministry of Defence might not want to publish too much of this," Mr Clayton added.

These dilemmas have prompted some members of the Cabinet's civil contingency unit to argue in favour of a policy of limited evacuation from East Anglia, for example, and parts of Scotland.

The Home Office would say yesterday only that its scientists were reviewing their methods of assessing casualties, though this would not be easy, given uncertainty surrounding possible attack patterns.

The Home Office, which has assumed that everyone will be indoors because of the effectiveness of the early-warning system, is also reviewing its assessment of post-attack blast on houses. It has consistently argued in the past that US comparisons are irrelevant because American houses are not so sturdy as British ones.

Although tests on brick houses were carried out in the US as far back as 1955, Mr Douglas Hurd, Home Office Minister responsible for civil defence, told *World in Action*: "A lot of the scientific argument is how right it is simply to accept the American calculations even though, for example, British housing tends to be a good deal more solid than American housing."

Reminded that Home Office scientists said in 1980 that they were identifying the most threatened areas of Britain, Mr Hurd insisted: "Speaking to you in 1983, I tell you we're not."

The documents show that Mr John Howard, head of the Home Office emergency services division (F6), reported that at least two Cabinet Ministers had expressed the view that nuclear war in Europe was inconceivable and that "there was no conceivable Soviet military or political objective which would justify to them (the Soviets) the remotest risk of having their cities and industries destroyed."

# Britain after the bomb: the official plan

## INSIGHT

by Phillip Kingdley

THE GOVERNMENT has just over the past weeks at the finished a computer course to train officers to run Britain after a nuclear holocaust. A copy of the course has reached *The Sunday Times*. It offers a chilling insight into the official view of this country after a nuclear strike.

Although our copy does not reveal some crucial assumptions — there is, for example, no indication of the size of the nuclear bombs or their targets — it is clear that the computer training programme does envisage limited economic recovery.

The training programme, one of the most ambitious the government has undertaken, is called Exercise Regenerate. It was developed by the Local Government Operational Research Unit in Reading and Manchester for the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. It has been running since 1979.

It assumes:

- The nuclear strike would blow Britain to an economy of the pre-1920s. Since coal would be the main source of energy, there might have to be special nuclear shelters for mining engineers and geologists to make certain that they survived.
- Some areas like Nottingham and Leicester would be "zones of catastrophe" where little moves except for rescue and salvage operations.
- Others would recover quickly and would even be back on a wages and banking system 28 days after the bomb.
- The country is run on a regional basis by "controllers". The population is divided into five groups: healthy, ill, sick, dying and dead. The healthy are further divided into "co-operative" and "criminal".

The official picture is of a Britain where fuel and cooking oil, most metals, and most types of food are in short supply. Electricity distribution is a problem because although steel pylons could be replaced with wooden ones, there is no metal for power lines.

Coal is once again king, the steam engine has come back into its own, bread is made with bialye or hard, frozen foods have vanished, drinking water is hard to get. There are preservation orders on sheep breeding stock — only the males can be eaten. Radiation deaths have caused "great distress" but the will to survive is strong and soon farm labourers are back at work and there is even "knitwear production in small units". But in some areas, "due to a lack of consumer goods and no tradition of saving", the prices of food and clothing have tended to rise.

The programme divides each region into eight zones and these are analysed for economic recovery on the assumption that regional government takes only minimum effective action itself. As an example, here are six zones, with extracts of the assumptions the programme makes for their recovery:

- **South Yorkshire:** "Enormous damage around Sheffield, but as little fall-out, radiation sickness will be low. Open-cast coal mining resumes quickly. Shortages of food, clothing, scrap metal, vehicle and plant components, chemicals."
- **South Humberside:** "Construction, pipework, telecommunication and clothing should take off quickly, particularly if an oil terminal is to be built to replace lost facilities at Immingham. Grimsby would re-open as a port and fishing town once free of heavy fall-out."
- **Mansfield/Newark:** "Great prospect of immediate recovery. The locale of this zone at the centre of the region with motorways and largely underground rail connections makes it ideal for locating stockpiles, strategic production and as a trading centre. There is a small but efficient local bank/finance network."
- **East Lincolnshire:** "Lincoln is destroyed and with it goes an important centre of modern engineering. Water and power restored with restrictions. More

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