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Modern Emergency Management Must Embrace Nuclear Civil Defense

From 1947-1989, the major countries of the world developed programs to educate their populations to survive a nuclear attack. Generically called “*Civil Defense*,” they focused on actions that citizens could take to reduce or eliminate their exposure to dangerous radiation after a nuclear explosion; it was discontinued when the Cold War ended.

In 2017, there are nine countries with nuclear weapons including North Korea, and Iran seeks to build a nuclear weapon. Both North Korea and Iran have threatened to use a nuclear weapon against other countries, including the U.S. Today our main risk of nuclear attack is a terrorist-deployed improvised nuclear device in a metropolitan area, or a nuclear-generated Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP).

The general public has lost the knowledge of the danger of radiation, and most first responders do not have the training or equipment to safely operate in the radiation-contaminated aftermath of a nuclear explosion. As a nation, we are not ready to respond to a nuclear explosion within our borders. First responders and the military will respond and make heroic efforts, but the average person won’t know what to do; radioactive fallout may kill and sicken more than the blast.

Civil Defense information deserves a place with the other potential hazards in our emergency preparedness curriculum, alongside earthquake and hurricane preparedness information. Do we really need to go through another post-9/11 soul search about what could have been done what before the incident happened? We know the threat is there, and have the opportunity to save lives.