**Cold War**

**1954**

**First nationwide civil defense drill held**

Over 12 million Americans “die” in a mock nuclear attack, as the United States goes through its first nationwide civil defense drill. Though American officials were satisfied with the results of the drill, the event stood as a stark reminder that the United States—and the world—was now living under a nuclear shadow.

The June 1954 civil defense drill was organized and evaluated by the Civil Defense Administration, and included operations in 54 cities in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Alaska, and Hawaii. Canada also participated in the exercise. The basic premise of the drill was that the United States was under massive nuclear assault from both aircraft and submarines, and that most major urban areas had been targeted. At 10 a.m., alarms were sounded in selected cities, at which time all citizens were supposed to get off the streets, seek shelter, and prepare for the onslaught. Each citizen was supposed to know where the closest fallout shelter was located; these included the basements of government buildings and schools, underground subway tunnels, and private shelters. Even President Dwight D. Eisenhower took part in the show, heading to an underground bunker in Washington, D.C. The entire drill lasted only about 10 minutes, at which time an all-clear signal was broadcast and life returned to normal. Civil Defense Administration officials estimated that New York City would suffer the most in such an attack, losing over 2 million people. Other cities, including Washington, D.C., would also endure massive loss of life. In all, it was estimated that over 12 million Americans would die in an attack.

Despite those rather mind-numbing figures, government officials pronounced themselves very pleased with the drill. Minor problems in communication occurred, and one woman in New York City managed to create a massive traffic jam by simply stopping her car in the middle of the road, leaping out, and running for cover. In most cities, however, the streets were deserted just moments after the alarms sounded and there were no signs of panic or criminal behavior. A more cautious assessment came from a retired military officer, who observed that the recent development of the hydrogen bomb by the Soviet Union had “outstripped the progress made in our civil defense strides to defend against it.”