Fallout Can 'Be Fun

By [MICHAEL S. GRURN](http://www.thecrimson.com/writer/9193/Michael_S._Grurn/), January 29, 1962

Responsible, patriotic Americans have long suspected that all this talk about nuclear holocausts extinguishing life from earth is just more Red propaganda designed to inject fear and panic and defeatism into the hearts of the citizens of this great and powerful country. Apparently they were right. For, according to the Defense Department's new pamphlet on fallout, nuclear warfare is only a little bit worse than natural disaster. If we just prepare for it everything will be all right.

Judging from the poetic language of the pamphlet, one might even surmise that the explosion is quite beautiful. Immediately following the detonation, a fireball forms--a "large, swiftly expanding sphere of hot gases, producing brilliant light and intense heat...." Something like a display of *aurora borealis.*

"As the brilliant fireball rises in the sky,"--and I pause here to note the exhilarating assonance, the repetition of the long *i* which so effectively expresses the sensation of rising--as the brilliant fireball rises, "it draws up a vast amount of earth.... A little later this material, condensing in the cold upper air *like rain or snow,* starts falling back to earth because, *like ash from a fire,* it is heavier than air." The metaphors lead us, as they should, to relate nuclear fallout to our everyday experience. Incidentally, the pamphlet informs those who didn't know, "it is called fallout because it falls out of the sky."

But we are rushing ahead of the story. First come the public warning signals, of which there are two varieties. One is a three to five minute STEADY TONE which means more or less that you have plenty of time. Just turn on your radio and await further instructions. The other signal lasts three minutes, and WARBLES--like a mockingbird, I guess. At this sound, "take cover immediately."

As we all know, however, there is little likelihood that the enemy would attack with no warning. But even with warning, some people may still lack a plan of action--"no shelter to go to, for example." In this eventuality, one's first move must be to guard against the hazards of fires. "Get rid of such quick burning things as oily rags, curtains, and lampshades." ("The spread of fires from a nuclear attack," by the way, "would be limited in the same ways as are peacetime fires--by barriers such as open space, rivers, highways, by rainfall--which is similar to fallout--and by varied distribution of burnable material." Just like peace-time fires.)

If, when an enemy air attack occurs, your family happens to be out on a picnic in nature's wide open spaces, "try to get to some substantial structure, such as a large commercial or civic building, a tunnel, or cave. If none of these is readily available, look for a culvert, underpass or ditch--anything that will get you below ground level--and improvise a shelter"--presumably with any old sandbags or concrete blocks that happen to be lying around.

**Teenage Moles**

The wiser among us will, of course, have already prepared a private family fallout shelter or, better still, will have reserved space in the community shelter (which, in peacetime, can serve a useful public function: "Gregarious teenagers often have no after-school hangout where they can relax with sodas and play the jukebox. This shelter can serve such purposes admirably; here a Scout meeting is going on in one section while adults attend an illustrated lecture in another").

Stocking a family shelter presents little or no problem to the man with a small measure of ingenuity. There are the obvious things like civil defense instruction material (several volumes), a large pail for "human waste," candles (for birthdays), and a calendar (for marking birthdays?) Next comes food. "Select familiar foods (they are more heartening and acceptable during times of stress)." For example, "peanut butter and jellies with crackers."

Most essential are your gamma ray detection instruments. To begin with, a ratemeter "is similar to a speedometer in a car except that it measures roentgens per hour rather than miles per hour." Next a dosimeter (to tell you how much you're dead)--it's comparable to an odometer except, of course, that it measures "total roentgens rather than miles."

After two weeks of getting to know the family, it's time to come out again into the brave new world. This is because after two weeks what is called "early fallout" has all fallen out (of the sky). A few radioactive elements such as strontium 90, cesium 137, and carbon 14, however, may remain aloft for months, and are therefore referred to as "delayed fallout." The Defense Department considers delayed fallout "less dangerous," even though "the long-term damaging effects of such exposure (to delayed fallout) are not yet known in great detail." So you needn't worry about that.

**Vocabulary Exercise**

At this point, the pamphlet's glossary becomes very useful. It includes such terms as MEGATON, GROUND ZERO, and A-BOMB and H-BOMB (two "popular terms for what should correctly be called nuclear weapons"), all of which can enliven cocktail conversation at survival parties and make their employer appear very erudite. For obvious security reasons, certain other useful words and phrases were omitted. For example: *Ja amerikanskij proletarij* (I am an American proletarian), *Da zdrstvuet krasnoye osvobozhdenye* (Long live the red liberation), and *tovarishch* (comrade).

In any case, after the re-emergence, at least eating will be a cinch. If you are a farmer, all you have to do, the book says, is go out to the barn and slaughter a cow. As everybody knows, cows are extremely sensitive to "nuclear weapons" and upon perceiving a detonation, immediately go into a two-week-long state of suspended animation. Fortunately, therefore, neither milking nor feeding is necessary during this period.

The pamphlet closes with a final warning to those who think they can get easy federal aid for shelter construction. No one can take advantage of the government like that. Action is the prerogative of state, local, and individual initiative. The Founding Fathers did not provide the Federal Government with authority to act in matters of fallout prevention, and those "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Yes, fallout protection is no joke. But this pleasant little pamphlet, by showing us how easy survival really is, offers us solid reassurance that when it comes to nuclear war we can thwart the Commies every time. They're even helping us do it. To begin with (and this is what the pamphlets' authors posit their entire civil defense program on, the enemy apparently plans to use only five-megaton "nuclear weapons." ("There are much larger weapons which could do more damage, but the damage from larger weapons does not increase in direct ratio to the size of the weapons"--so forget them.) And the Department hints at another Communist weakness by mentioning that "a tall apartment or office building 10 miles or more from the exposition could be one of the safest refuges."

Now, non-cognoscenti may pass this off as absurd. Why should Russia use only five-megaton bombs? And what apartment or office building will be more than 10 miles from ground zero? But the Pentagon has closer ties to the CIA than we do, and if the CIA thinks the Commies are going to attack Westchester County instead of Wall Street, that's the way it's going to be.

One can hardly praise this book enough and one wonders if an edition of merely 25 million copies will be sufficient to meet the demand. In any case, it certainly does give President Kennedy's campaign to propagate culture a decided boost, for *Fallout Protection* contends more favorably than even *Huckleberry Finn* or *Moby Dick* for the title Great American Novel.