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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Civil Defense Administration Information on Radioactive Fallout and Atomic Warfare

Date: April 15, 1955

Recording number: Reel-to-reel Tape 5, part 2

Length of recording: 5:17

[transcript begins]

Announcer 1: The following material was recorded on April 15th, 1955.

Announcer 2: Ladies and Gentleman, there has been considerable comment from many sources on the subject of radioactive fallout as the result of atomic and hydrogen bomb explosions. Here to give us the true facts about this is the Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, Governor Val Peterson.

Peterson: Thank you. I know that you have all heard about hydrogen bombs. Perhaps, too, you have heard of something called radioactive fallout, which comes from both atomic and hydrogen weapons. What I am going to tell you now might someday save your life. And remember your skills are important if our country is to survive. First, you have all seen pictures of the familiar mushroom of the atomic or hydrogen bomb. If such a bomb explodes close to the ground, or into the ground, thousands of tons of polarized earth and stone and brick and steel particles are sucked up into the cloud, 60 or 80,000 feet into the air. These particles become highly radioactive. Much of this material spills out of the mushroom cloud around the point of explosion. The rest is carried along by the winds for some distance before it falls to the earth. These falling particles are what is called fallout.

Today, for the first time, the threat of atomic warfare casts a direct shadow not only over our major cities, but on people in towns and villages and isolated farm houses 100 miles or more down-wind from where the bomb is exploded. Not only are they and their families threatened by this dangerous substance, but their cattle, sheep, and hogs, their crops and feed-stocks as well.

If you happen to be caught down-wind within the fallout area without any shelter, and if you don't get under cover just as rapidly as you can, these radioactive particles could cause your death. Or they may cause you serious injury depending on the degree of contamination and other factors. There are three things to remember about radioactive fallout. First, downwind from the point of explosion, outside of the area of blast and fire damage, radioactivity might take several hours to reach its peak. This would allow time to warn inhabitants to take protective action.

Second, radioactivity from fallout does not linger indefinitely, but dies away rapidly. Simple decontamination measures, like washing or discarding contaminated clothes and scrubbing yourself if you have been exposed, these can remove most of the lingering radioactivity.

Third, almost any kind of protective cover can reduce the danger of radiation. An ordinary frame house, outside the area of blast and fire, will reduce the radiation danger to one-half of what it would be in the open. A basement shelter will provide even more protection, reducing the danger to one-tenth. While an old-fashioned cyclone cellar, with three feet of earth covering, will reduce the danger to one five-thousandth, virtually complete protection.

One thing you want to remember about shelter, however, is that once in it, you may not be able to go outdoors for three to five days except for short periods. So make sure you have a radio handy, preferably battery operated in case of power failure. That is where you will get official Civil Defense news and instructions over the CONELRAD Emergency Broadcasting Network. 640 or 1240 will be on your dial. Don't forget. If you live beyond the range of an air raid sirens, radio will be your chief means of learning whether fallout is drifting your way and what to do about it. Stock your shelter with emergency supplies of essentials, such as blankets, first aid kits, food and water and other articles. I'd like to emphasize this one point in closing: we will do all we can in the Federal Government to get any additional information to you on defense against these new weapons as fast as the scientists can give it to us, and believe me, there are defenses. We'll help you all we can, but the responsibility is first of all yours, to be determined in conjunction with your local Civil Defense Director. Cooperate with him by participating in evacuation and shelter tests, by taking first aid, and other Civil Defense training. Help that Civil Defense Director of yours all you can. He has a big job, a job that could save your life, the lives of your family, your neighbors, the life of our nation. Thank you.

Announcer 1: The previous material was recorded on April 15, 1955.

[transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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