

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – EAU CLAIRE

Frank Zeidler, Milwaukee, and Cold War Civil Defense

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of History in Candidacy for the
Bachelor of Arts and Sciences

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“Some cities and communities, in building up civil defense, have been fortunate in possessing strong leadership. Such a city is Milwaukee, which has been in the forefront in creating a practical civil defense organization. Chief credit for this goes to Mayor Frank P. Zeidler, who has consistently supported and worked to implement civil defense wherever possible.”

- Major General Ralph J. Olson and Colonel John W. Fitzpatrick, testifying to Congress, June 25, 1956¹

¹ Olson, Ralph J., and John W. Fitzpatrick, “Civil Defense Activity Summary for the Military Operations Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations of the House of Representatives,” June 25, 1956: 2. Box 10, Folder “Reports: Report to Holifield Subcommittee, 1956.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

Abstract

Civil defense in the Cold War encompassed the development of government policies and procedures to evacuate, shelter, and decentralizing American populations and industries in the event of a nuclear war. This project employs a body of primary documents to examine the unacknowledged role of Milwaukee's last Socialist mayor as a trailblazer in the design and implementation of civil defense policy during his tenure from 1948 until 1960. Under the leadership of the Zeidler Administration the city of Milwaukee was an exemplary national model for civil defense planning. Yet despite superior planning, implementation of civil defense in Milwaukee, like elsewhere, suffered both from apathy and the practical impossibility of preparing for nuclear disaster. This research contributes to our understanding of local defense and offers insight into the contemporary politics of municipal government in the metropolitan area of Milwaukee.

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Introduction

When one thinks of Cold War civil defense, thoughts of nuclear explosions, fallout shelters, and silly animations of 'Bert the Turtle' in the instructional animated short, 'Duck and Cover', come to mind. However, civil defense in this era was much more than what many realize. Civil defense during the Cold War was not unlike the government push for homeland security in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

In the Cold War, civil defense helped legitimize the foreign policy of nuclear deterrence by reinforcing the incredulous idea that nuclear war was survivable; like recovering from a natural disaster, a community could persist in the aftermath of a nuclear detonation.² Civil defense helped militarize the populace by imbuing in Americans a state of quasi-military readiness previously unknown.³ Leaders theatrically rehearsed nuclear disaster⁴ and through civil defense helped gain public acceptance of nuclear weapons. Civil defense also contributed to the general acceptance of the federal government's responsibility to create numerous defensive institutions which persist into the present, decades after the Cold War.⁵

The Cold War was of national and global concern, but at the forefront localities were also affected. Across the United States Americans made strides to prepare for a nuclear eventuality. Large industrial urban areas bore the greatest sense of urgency, for one bomb could annihilate the city's entire population and industry. American leaders viewed the country's industrial production capacity as essential. For during the Second World War it was not merely the men on the front lines who won the war, but the sheer amount of materiel produced in American

² Oakes, Guy, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 165-166.

³ McEnaney, Laura, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 4.

⁴ Davis, Tracy C, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) 4.

⁵ Grossman, Andrew D. *Neither Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War*, (New York: Routledge, 2001) 128-129.

factories which kept the GIs going. After the great success of World War II, policymakers once again would rely upon industry both to win and recover in the event of World War III.⁶

The city of Milwaukee was one of these large urban areas which necessitated preparation. Milwaukee served as a potential target because it at the time was among the largest industrial powerhouses in the country. As a large

industrial center it also was among the most populated cities. However, in Milwaukee and its metropolitan area, civil defense planning rose to new heights. Under the leadership of Mayor Frank Paul Zeidler (pronounced rhyming with



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“side”), an individual renowned as Milwaukee’s last Socialist mayor, Milwaukee demonstrated what cities could do in preparation for the seemingly inevitable nuclear war. This involved dramatic changes in policy, extensive planning, reorganization of local government, and cooperation between varying municipalities as well as between governments at the federal, state, and local levels.

Civil defense and the greater geopolitical Cold War conflict did not exist within a bubble. Civil defense and the Cold War were only two sides of a very complex political die which affected the politics and attitudes within the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area. In the wake of World War II there was a serious housing shortage. This coincided with the national sociological movement of ‘White Flight’ typical of Northern industrial cities that precipitated massive outward metropolitan expansion.⁷ In Milwaukee this was only encouraged by a number of city planners who sought to expand outward and decentralize as a principle unto itself. It

⁶ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 126-127.

⁷ Gurda, John, *The Making of Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999) 321-325,

received further legitimacy due to Cold War nuclear concerns.⁸ Extending the city's borders exacerbated longstanding feuds when the suburbs refused city attempts at annexation. Milwaukee leaders attempted to prevent its smaller neighbors from forming an "iron ring"⁹ around the city. This departure of individuals with primarily higher incomes devastated the city's coffers as lower income individuals moved into the city center. This weakened the wealth, power, and influence of the city.¹⁰ Due to the decline of Milwaukee's historic core as lower income individuals moved into older housing, city leaders attempted to develop new urban housing as a way to combat blight and improve the city.¹¹ Suburbanization and urban decay were among many of the pressing issues of the period. Despite some scholarly attention, many issues that were native to Milwaukee politics and society, much less civil defense during the Cold War, remain largely unexplored in the historiography of Milwaukee.

To fill the gap and address the civil defense history of one city, this paper seeks to indicate how Milwaukee was exemplary, serving as a national model in the development of civil defense policy and preparedness. Furthermore, this project will show the city was an archetype due to the administration of Mayor Zeidler. It also argues, however, that despite significant advances in policy and preparation, civil defense in practice was as problematic in Milwaukee as it was nationwide. Efforts to implement civil defense policies were largely thwarted due to insurmountable technical hurdles, as well as combined political/public apathy and skepticism. Finally, this paper also illustrates how civil defense did not exist in a vacuum, but indeed coexisted with a number of other issues affecting the everyday lives of individuals in Milwaukee

⁸ McCarthy, John M., *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960*, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009) 128-130,

⁹ Zeidler, Frank P., *A Liberal in City Government: My Experiences as Mayor of Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Publishers, 2005) 89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 319-321, 339-340, 346

and nationwide. In accordance with other issues such as suburbanization, the city's growth, and the central highway system, Milwaukee's civil defense policies continue to have a lasting positive impact on the city's urban development.

Primary sources indicate this project's thesis through utilizing substantial archival evidence from centers of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison and Milwaukee as well as the Central Library in Milwaukee. These documents consist of meeting minutes and inter-bureaucratic communications as well as reports detailing civil defense at the city, county, and state governmental levels. Various published documents explaining civil defense to the public and reports detailing the results of civil defense exercises produced in Milwaukee and Madison available in the Central Library and University of Wisconsin libraries also provide key evidence. Finally this project utilizes contemporary newspaper reports from the *Milwaukee Journal* to flesh out Milwaukee's civil defense story.

This project emphasizes civil defense in southeast Wisconsin during Mayor Zeidler's tenure from 1948 to 1960. Civil defense at this time was the most active and in the public eye. As the 1960s progressed, civil defense grew increasingly irrelevant in the public eye. Section I of this paper details the development of the political and legislative history of civil defense in Milwaukee and Wisconsin while comparing it with national developments. Section II details civil defense efforts in practice and the difficulties encountered. Finally, the tertiary section examines the lasting legacy of civil defense in Milwaukee.

A Brief Review of the Historiographies of Milwaukee and Cold War Civil Defense

While civil defense against a nuclear threat may have been, in practical terms, an unattainable goal, it nonetheless represented a sincere attempt to do something in the face of an extreme threat. In terms of public policy, Milwaukee was a leading example of what could be

done if individuals and governments came together to solve a common dilemma. While civil defense may not have been the most practical policy, it coincided with other policies of importance in Milwaukee whose legacies can be seen today.

The issues affecting both civil defense and the city of Milwaukee in the 1950s were diverse. However, both civil defense and Milwaukee history suffer from underdevelopment of historical scholarly research. In areas such as urban history, Milwaukee has only just begun to receive greater historical treatment. This is in spite of Milwaukee's former status as an industrial juggernaut unique to the upper Midwest in that it served as a center of immigration known as both "the most 'foreign' city in America"¹² and the "German Athens."¹³ The city once held these titles due to the city's dominance by Germans and other immigrant groups. One cannot also forget that Milwaukee was also once a capital of American socialism. Before John Gurda's 1999 *The Making of Milwaukee*, the only other significant city biography was Bayrd Still's 1948 *Milwaukee: The History of a City*. Gurda primarily addresses the economic development of the city with significant ink devoted to the contributions of various immigrant groups. Still's work is primarily a political history, showing the dynamics of Milwaukee's municipal politics and giving significant acclaim to Milwaukee. He accorded such praise while the city was reaching its peak in industrial might. Historical research addressing the many particularities of the city's history remains to be done.¹⁴

Recent works such as John M. McCarthy's *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960*, make strides in covering Milwaukee's unique past. McCarthy's work sheds light on the city's unique position in planning its growth and expansion

¹² Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁴ Anderson, Margo and Victor Greene, "Introduction: Milwaukee in Perspective", Ed. by Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 7-10.

under the helm of city planners and Socialist mayors. The concept of civil defense neatly fit in with the city planning objectives of contemporary leaders such as Mayor Zeidler. However, McCarthy's perspective, while touching upon civil defense, is focused on urban planning. This project, in contrast, examines the link between civil defense and urban planning with civil defense as the focus of analysis. Furthermore, McCarthy does not highlight Zeidler's role as a civil defense pioneer and does not accentuate that civil defense was more than just a means to an end. Zeidler had an authentic interest in civil defense for its own sake; he wanted to do something to protect his city.¹⁵

Examining civil defense in Milwaukee before McCarthy's work, only a few historians such as John Gurda and Laura McEnaney have ever mentioned it. McCarthy has written the most on the subject but no scholar has taken the time to fully contextualize Milwaukee within civil defense. However, there are a number of generalized works which provide a framework for the city's civil defense history.

Examining the historical literature on civil defense, scholarly work concerning civil defense has been relatively minimal comparing it with other Cold War subjects. Of the more important titles, non-historians have made important contributions to the historiography. One of the earliest works to address the history of civil defense was political scientist Thomas J. Kerr's *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?* (1983). Kerr wrote his book examining civil defense from a policy and legal perspective until 1983. However, this work has some limitations due to it being written in the midst of the Cold War, not fully able to utilize hindsight as those in the 1990s and onwards. Nonetheless, it is an excellent record of civil defense's

¹⁵ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 144.

national history, providing a Cold War perspective of someone who lived through civil defense as a topic of public discussion.¹⁶

Another decade would pass along with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain before another significant work focused on civil defense would come to fruition. This was sociologist Guy Oakes' *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (1994). Oakes' work serves as the foundation for all post-Cold War scholarly civil defense research. He contends that civil defense was a government attempt at social engineering to justify American Cold War foreign policy. With an expansive Soviet Union seen as a threat to American interests, nuclear deterrence was a policy which had to be maintained. However, government officials were concerned the public would not accept nuclear deterrence due to the inherent risk associated with nuclear war on the civilian populace. To mitigate this Washington promoted civil defense by educating the public about the destruction of nuclear weapons while simultaneously ensuring its survivability through simple measures families could do at home under the government's guidance.¹⁷

Building off of Oakes' thesis, Laura McEnaney wrote *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (2000). While national in scope, her work examines civil defense from the intimate perspective of the centrality of the home and family. Affirming Oakes' basic position, she goes on to argue the government attempted to militarize the public while not making it seem evident and that American society has become more militarized since the Cold War's inception. McEnaney emphasizes the civil defense tenet of self-help at the individual and familial levels to build fallout shelters, stockpile food, and practice civil defense drills. Yet despite all this, the public did not fall in line with the government's objectives. *Civil*

¹⁶ Kerr, Thomas J., *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983).

¹⁷ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 17-21, 30-32.

Defense Begins at Home goes even further by illustrating how labor, women, the family, and the African-American community related to civil defense.¹⁸

A year later political scientist Andrew D. Grossman published *Neither Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (2001). Grossman, a political scientist, makes broad overarching arguments against American exceptionalism and the notion that the civil rights movement would have been for naught without the Cold War. Grossman maintains the argument that President Truman had the ability to use American institutions with the liberal consensus to promote a strong liberalist policy domestically but instead confined American liberalism due to concerns regarding international security. As a result, he argues, Truman's policies militarized American society and created a political culture which was at times oppressive. For the purposes of this paper, his first chapter on the development of civil defense contextualizes it within a grander Cold War scheme.¹⁹

Lastly, the most recent title comes from Tracy C. Davis, professor of theater and performing arts at Northwestern. *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (2007) illustrates how in many respects civil defense was a form of theater by examining civil defense efforts in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. The book demonstrates how civil defense utilized theatrical tactics and forms of rehearsal to satisfy Cold War needs. Davis argues the simulation of problems through theatricality was not unlike the military's use of war games for practice. This book sheds a unique perspective on civil defense which allows the reader to

¹⁸ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 12-16, 23, 28.

¹⁹ Grossman, Andrew D. *Neither Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War*, (New York: Routledge, 2001) xi-xii.

understand the intricacies behind what civil defense officials did on the ground during test exercises.²⁰

The preceding works on civil defense make important contributions to the civil defense historiography but all do so on a national scope. Research examining civil defense solely from the perspective of a city is comparatively rare. Few articles exist detailing specific accounts of civil defense in a given city and they are not exhaustive analyses published in the form of a book or dissertation. Such an example is “Defending Philadelphia: A Historical Case Study of Civil Defense in the Early Cold War.”²¹ This leaves much room for historical scholarship connecting the interplay between various Cold War domestic urban histories and national foreign policy. If historians examine the civil defense histories of other individual cities, they will likely find common themes, though unique situations, to what occurred in Milwaukee. After sufficient research historians may then be able to glean a greater truth from the history of civil defense in the United States.

Notes from the Author

The intention behind this project was to make it accessible for both local and national audiences. Area residents can enjoy the details such as street names and landmarks while national readers can see Milwaukee’s part in civil defense and urban history. Yet there may be certain nuances which require additional commentary.

To clarify possible confusion the author shall explain terminology based on the word “Milwaukee” and its geographic understanding. Milwaukee County is composed of nineteen municipalities; the largest one in terms of land area and population is the city of Milwaukee. The

²⁰ Davis, Tracy C., *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) 2, 4.

²¹ Knowles, Scott Gabriel, “Defending Philadelphia: A Historical Case Study of Civil Defense in the Early Cold War,” *Public Works Management Policy*, 11 (2007): 217.

other municipalities in terms of governance are independent of each other and the city.

However, some governmental functions are shared at the county level for the sake of efficiency and uniformity.

In terms of geographic description used in language, the term “Milwaukee” can be all-encompassing of Milwaukee County or can be used specifically for the city. The term is used quite generally by residents in and around Milwaukee County. It is not uncommon for residents living a county or two over from Milwaukee County to say ‘they are from Milwaukee,’ to ease understanding of local origin, when in reality they are not. Whenever possible the author has made the point of specifically writing ‘the city of Milwaukee’ or ‘Milwaukee County’ but may refer to ‘Milwaukee’ in the general sense to establish a broader paradigm. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Area, especially the municipalities of Milwaukee County, is essentially one large – albeit divided – community.

Despite being a part of a greater community, throughout this project the city of Milwaukee and its mayor receive the most emphasis. However, the city did not exist in a bubble; its exchanges with other nearby municipal entities and counties were integral to the political dynamics of civil defense. As the reader shall see, the actions of these entities helped shape southeast Wisconsin and even the United States as it is today.

I. Milwaukee: A Model for Civil Defense Planning

A. Introduction

It was not long after the rubble began to clear in World War II's aftermath that international tension was on the rise again. The United States and Soviet Union as former allies were now bitter rivals vying to fill the power vacuum left by a ruined Europe and Asia. In January 1950 the government circulated the NSC 68 document, an article of significance in the development of Cold War strategic thought. The report addressed fears that the Soviet Union had the potential to surprise the United States and its allies with a massive nuclear attack. These fears stemmed from an American-Soviet conflict of world interests and ideology. American leaders promoted a policy of nuclear deterrence; believing it as a necessity to protect the interests of the United States in Western Europe and around the globe. This deterrence depended upon the United States appearing credible in its willingness to use nuclear weapons; even at the risk of those weapons being used against the United States. Policymakers then had to ensure the public will would stand behind their objectives.²²

Leaders believed public opinion was a fickle and precarious thing. Policymakers assumed most Americans had grown soft in a postwar boom of pleasure and consumption. Leaders found it dubious that Americans would tolerate the eventuality of nuclear war and would turn to fear if the United States were ever on the brink. The federal government had to solve the perceived dilemma of a timid public which could have derailed international policy designs. The public could have done so by opposing deterrence out of fear of nuclear obliteration. The response of federal planners was to attempt emotion management to allay potential civilian fears through education of the public about nuclear war. Civil defense leaders promoted the idea that

²² Grossman, *Neither Dead Nor Red*, 1, 3; Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 20-21.

through civil defense, nuclear war was survivable. It would serve as merely a minor setback; not a global holocaust.²³ However, holocaust was not initially upon the minds of local leaders when they first started formulating civil disaster policy.

Local leaders and those at the federal level differed in incentive for civil defense and civil defense began differently depending on locale. While federal leaders possessed concerns of grand foreign policy designs, municipal government had to address local issues and immediate dangers. Many in Washington were disinterested in civil defense, but some desired to have plans in place to protect their families back home. Likewise, for Milwaukee a local concern grew to be one which the Zeidler Administration would proactively pressure the state and federal governments to address.

Civil defense in Milwaukee as originally conceived was simply a municipal attempt to allay manmade and natural disasters. It ultimately evolved to meet the conditions of the time. Due to the global political climate, priorities necessarily shifted toward protecting citizens and the city's interests from a nuclear war.

Nuclear annihilation was of course not in the interests of the people of Milwaukee, but city leaders also used civil defense to advance various coinciding elements of the city's agenda. These issues included the construction of the highway system through the city, the attempt at political dominance over Milwaukee County and the surrounding region. Encompassing the city of Milwaukee's claims for power included the legitimation of the city's territorial annexation efforts, an aspect of its urban planning goals. In competition with other communities, this led to bitter strife between urban and suburban governments.

Despite the use of civil defense to achieve other political objectives, it was not merely a means to an end. It is clear from the compelling efforts of Frank Zeidler and his administration

²³ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 30-34, 46-47, 78-79.

that civil defense was an end unto itself. With nuclear war seeming imminent, local government had to take action to safeguard the populace. With little done anywhere else in the nation, Frank Zeidler took it upon his administration to bring civil defense in motion by setting the example. He did this by establishing a city bureaucratic civil defense structure capable of operational capacity. That is why Milwaukee was a locus for the study and development of civil defense; both he and the city received continuous praise as a result. Milwaukee was one of the first cities to have its government organized for civil defense and among those to establish the necessary research and development of emergency procedures. Being a forerunner, Milwaukee was an example for other cities to follow.

Milwaukee served as a model all the way to the steps of Capitol Hill. The Zeidler Administration used its clout and civil defense experience to both develop and promote federal civil defense policy. Frank Zeidler himself received national recognition as a leader in civil defense in virtue of his advocacy. Yet Milwaukee leadership need not have taken such steps were it not for the bitter political and ideological Cold War dispute between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union.

B. Preventing Local Disaster

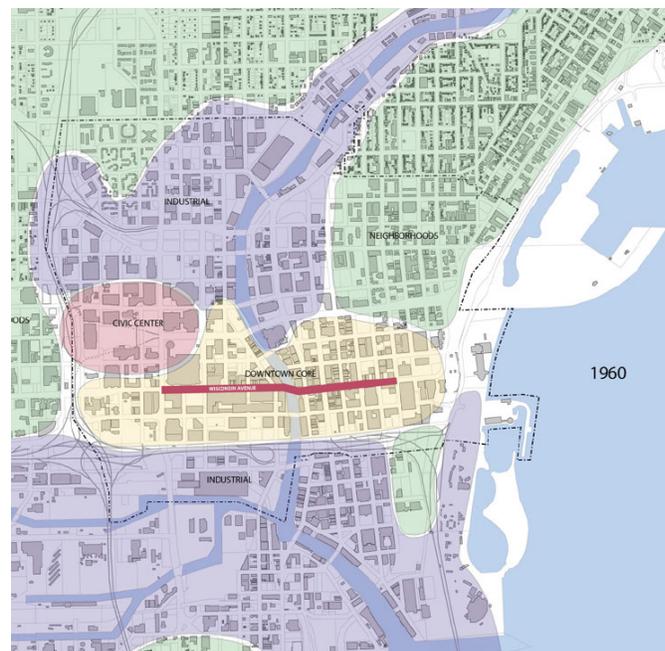
i. Civil Defense Beginnings

While the Cold War was of importance, Milwaukee leaders did not share the same immediate concerns as those in Washington. The viability of the city and local issues were their priorities. What initially spurred Mayor Zeidler to action in addressing disasters was the concern of preventing something like the incident in Texas City.²⁴ Only a year earlier huge explosions had rocked the Southern city due to negligence of hazardous chemicals at the docks. Known as

²⁴ Zeidler, Frank P., "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 6, no. 8-9 (August/September 1950): 249-251, 286. *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost*. (accessed October 28, 2011).

one of the worst industrial accidents in American history, over 580 people died, over 1,000 buildings were destroyed, and the force of the explosion was felt 80 miles away.²⁵ The disaster in Texas City was something very possible in Milwaukee and had the potential to be even more disastrous. Milwaukee's economy revolved around heavy industry, its population center was clustered within a relatively small area of land and the city sported a large population density. A similar incident to Texas City would have disastrous implications to the city's population and industry which served as the impetus for Milwaukee's prosperity.²⁶

The centrality of industry in the Cream City's economy cannot be understated; likewise neither can the city's standing as a major population center. The city possessed the notoriety as a beer capital due to the presence of Miller, Pabst, and Schlitz; but was primarily home to manufacturers of industrial components, engines, heavy machinery, electrical equipment, and other necessities for industrial production. Between the years of 1946 and 1953, minimally 56 percent of Milwaukee's labor pool received employment from manufacturing.²⁷



Downtown zoning, 1960. Courtesy of the city of Milwaukee "Comprehensive Milwaukee Plan." (See bibliography)

This largely industrial labor pool contributed to making Milwaukee the thirteenth most populous US city in 1950. Its population density was immense. The city's land area was merely

²⁵ Dingus, Ann, and Evan Smith, "Boom Town," *Texas Monthly* 25, no. 4 (April 1997): 26. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 19, 2011).

²⁶ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 249.

²⁷ Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 323-324.

50 square miles but possessed a population of 637,392 producing a population density of 12,748 per square mile.²⁸ The city of Milwaukee's population dominated the area; the total of Milwaukee County's population was 871,047.²⁹ Since then the area has seen dramatic changes in demographics; but the 1950 statistics concerned Zeidler because if something like a Texas City Disaster occurred in Milwaukee, a great number of people would suffer living within such a high concentration of industry.

With these concerns in mind, Mayor Frank Zeidler formed the Milwaukee Civil Disaster Relief Committee shortly after taking office in June 1948. It was an organization consisting of various city bureaucrats and citizens working outside of city government. In its original conception, area leaders utilized the committee to examine potential natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, or fires, to analyze potential solutions to ameliorate loss of life, property, and business through cooperation and government action. The committee's chartering by the Common Council, the city's legislature, granted the committee, the mayor, and his subordinates, authority to write rules and regulations for the safety of the city. The charter also authorized the mayor to cooperate with the leaders at all levels of government, but especially with other municipalities by forming mutual aid compacts. With these powers in place, officeholders believed the city would better cope with emergency situations.³⁰

ii. The Milwaukee Plan

As time progressed and Cold War tensions escalated, the views of Zeidler and other city leaders pertaining to civil disaster changed from emphasizing industrial accidents and natural

²⁸ United States Census Bureau, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1950,"

<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab18.txt>> (accessed 2/25/2012).

²⁹ Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, "Technical Report NO. 11: The Population of Southeastern Wisconsin," (Waukesha, WI: The Commission, July 2004) 80.

<http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPCFiles/Publications/TechRep/tr-011_population_southeastern_wisconsin.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2012).

³⁰ Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee, "The Milwaukee Plan: Organization Manual", (Milwaukee: The Committee, 1951) 1, 4, 27-29.

disasters to the inclusion of strategic bombing or nuclear war as possible municipal hazards. This was directly a result from mounting Cold War tensions. Between the years of 1948 and 1951 the United States intervened with the Berlin Airlift against a Soviet blockade of the divided German capital, the communists seized control of China, the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb, and the Korean War began. The mayor viewed nuclear war as a calamity to his city and fellow citizens. As a result he shifted the Civil Disaster Relief Committee's focus toward the Cold War civil defense conceptualized today.³¹ Zeidler demonstrated this through his writing to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*³² and he would join a chorus of other local leaders urging the federal government for action.³³

Aside from his own local initiatives he and the (renamed) Milwaukee Civil Disaster and Defense Committee pushed the Wisconsin state legislature to pass relevant civil defense legislation. Milwaukee leaders lobbied the state for the sake of their city and for others like it. As far as the committee knew, they had the most advanced civil defense program in the country and had to share what they had devised. The committee meeting minutes from April 22, 1949 suggested as much: "The organization we have is so far superior to any other in the country that we have a mission – it is to inform our legislature and also inform the new national agency...of the type of organization we have arranged here."³⁴ This was necessary for the city to work more closely with the federal National Security Resources Board (NSRB) and receive federal information.³⁵ At the behest of Governor Oscar Rennebohm, State Senator Warren P. Knowles submitted Bill No. 516, S. to the legislature during the 1949 legislative session. To the dismay

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³² Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 251.

³³ Kerr, *Civil Defense In the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 25.

³⁴ Milwaukee Civil Disaster Relief Committee, "Minutes of Meeting," April 22, 1949. Box 54, Folder 10. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981. City Archives, Central Library, Milwaukee, WI.

³⁵ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 251.

of its promoters, the state senate with a majority of ten to sixteen let the bill die by refusing to bring it to the floor.³⁶ One reason cited for the majority's resistance to civil defense in Wisconsin was a belief that it would violate individual civil rights.³⁷ Unfortunately, without a state civil defense program, Milwaukee's civil defense efforts were hindered. Defeated by the state legislature, Zeidler was among the mayors pushing for a change in NSRB policy to work directly with municipalities.³⁸

Zeidler's efforts did not stop with pressure on the NSRB. He continued to develop Milwaukee's civil defense program basing its composition on the writings detailed in the Hopley Report, a federal study establishing the basis for civil defense.³⁹ Using the government's study, the emphasis of the Civil Disaster Relief Committee by April 1950 had changed from solely natural and industrial disasters to attacks on the city via nuclear weapons or strategic bombing. The committee's program had a number of objectives which the committee devised as part of the "Milwaukee Plan",⁴⁰ the blueprints for the city's civil defense program.

City leaders obviously wanted to save as many people and as much of the city as possible which required much from the Milwaukee Plan. They would need a plan malleable to numerous circumstances. Milwaukee and its citizens would have to be as self-sufficient as possible yet also have the capability to coordinate with nearby localities to receive and give aid. Naturally the city would have to conform with the policies of the state of Wisconsin and the federal government as well. State and local institutions such as the Civil Air Patrol, the Milwaukee Naval Reserve, the Wisconsin National Guard, the state Air National Guard, the Milwaukee

³⁶ Wisconsin Legislative Council, "Civil Defense: Preliminary Report to the Civil Defense Committee, Wisconsin Legislative Council," (Madison: The Council, 1950) 2.

³⁷ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 251.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁴⁰ Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee, "The Milwaukee Plan: Organization Manual."

County Medical Society, local taxi firms, the Milwaukee County Funeral Directors Association and other organizations and institutions played a role.⁴¹ Going more local, the entities under city purview had to coordinate for the purposes of civil defense in addition to their normal responsibilities. These included the fire and police departments, city utilities and public works, hospitals, transportation, housing and industrial regulators, legal and welfare services, public information and schools, as well as the administration.⁴² To achieve all of this Zeidler needed a strategy.

Milwaukee, like other large cities, had three options in civil defense had nuclear deterrence failed and nuclear war broke out. These options were decentralization of the city through industrial and population dispersal, evacuation, and the construction of fallout shelters. From a logical standpoint against nuclear war, it would make sense to spread out the population and industry of a city to the point where even a nuclear detonation would make it more difficult to entirely destroy an urban center. Evacuation would involve sufficient planning to remove the majority of a city's population out of harm's way but would have been and still is difficult to implement. Lastly, the construction of shelters was one strategy where individuals could attempt to survive a nuclear impact. This would involve little movement but would require prior preparation.⁴³ However, the legislators in Congress were unwilling to allocate the vast sums of money necessary to assist cities in the implementation of a sufficient shelter program. Estimates on costs to properly shelter everyone ranged from \$16 to \$300 billion.⁴⁴

⁴¹ United States Congress, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, "Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack: Hearing before the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Congress of the United States, Eighty-First congress, Second Session on Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack, Part 5; April 3, 1950", (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950) 131-133.

⁴² Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee, "The Milwaukee Plan: Organization Manual," 9-15.

⁴³ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 35-37.

⁴⁴ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 42-47.

To varying degrees city hall implemented all three options. In the initial Milwaukee Plan planners only included dispersion and evacuation.⁴⁵ Industrial and population dispersion was the Zeidler Administration's long term goal,⁴⁶ but Zeidler⁴⁷ and leading administrators such as George A. Parkinson⁴⁸ favored evacuation as a more immediate solution.

By October 1950 the *Bulletin* regarded Milwaukee as "well advanced in its protective preparations"⁴⁹ because the city was one of the few at the time to have such measures in place. As a result of Milwaukee's initiatives, the city sent its Deputy Director for Administration and chief civil defense official to testify before the federal Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy whose testimony and criticism of the federal government were a part of the deliberations concerning what would become the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950.⁵⁰

The Zeidler Administration continued to advance its civil defense program and implement the Milwaukee Plan after the passage of the Federal Civil Defense Act. The Plan required additional information which the Zeidler Administration could only obtain by initiating studies pertinent to civil defense. Examined in more detail later, the most important ones came to fruition around 1954. These surveys examined the viability of evacuation and the traffic patterns required for evacuation.⁵¹ A third general study pursued abating the city's vulnerability via examining a multitude of demographic, economic, governmental, and infrastructural

⁴⁵ Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee, "The Milwaukee Plan: Organization Manual," 15-18.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 140-144.

⁴⁷ Federal Civil Defense Administration. "A Report on the Washington Conference of Mayors and Other Local Government Executives on National Security, December 2-3, 1954," 40-43.

⁴⁸ Parkinson, George A., "Civil Defense: A New Look", April 16, 1954: 6. Box 11, Folder "Safety-Industrial Defense, 1951-1961." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁴⁹ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 251.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 249, 286.

⁵¹ Wilber Smith and Associates, "An Evacuation Study of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area for the Federal Civil Defense Administration; Supplement and Chapter dealing with Traffic Control and Supervision Prepared by The Traffic Institute, Northwestern University," (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954).

factors.⁵² Even with such information at hand, the Zeidler Administration understood that the city could not save its citizens without collaboration with nearby municipalities and the Wisconsin state government. Unfortunately for city leaders, state lawmakers were not nearly as interested as the leaders in Milwaukee.

iii. Persistent State and Rural Apathy

Despite the passage of the Federal Civil Defense Act late in 1950, civil defense continued to be a nonissue in most of Wisconsin. The only exceptions were localities such as Milwaukee, where the leadership took initiative to have some policies in place. Zeidler was displeased with the Wisconsin state government's attitude toward civil defense. In 1951, he wrote in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* disapproving of the state's domination by rural interests indifferent to what could happen to Milwaukee due to the fact that rural areas were less likely targets.⁵³

While the Wisconsin state government was largely disinterested, it did not entirely abdicate its responsibility. Until 1955 the state passed primarily minor legislation despite the passage of the Federal Civil Defense Act. In response to the Act, the Wisconsin legislature created 20.03 (4) and 21.024 in Chapter 4 of the 1951 Statutes. The former allocated a small sum of \$10,000 toward civil defense while the latter designated the governor and the state adjutant general as responsible for organizing state civil defense. The statute also permitted the executive branch to collaborate with other state governments and the federal government.⁵⁴

Later that year the state government passed more substantial legislation. Chapter 443 of the 1951 Statutes modified 21.024 and created 20.019. This law more thoroughly specified the

⁵² Sutermeister, Oscar, "Reduction of Vulnerability in the Milwaukee Area: An Exploratory Study by Oscar Sutermeister," (Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration & Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Administration, 1954).

⁵³ Zeidler, "Local Government Looks at the Civil Defense Act", 57.

⁵⁴ Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, e-mail message to author, April 17, 2012.

role and function of civil defense. It created a state office with a director and allowed certain powers to the governor should he have declared a state of emergency. Until the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955, the legislature passed only two other sizeable pieces of legislation which mostly clarified and defined nuances within the law after Chapter 443 of the 1951 Statutes.⁵⁵

Legalities aside, the state also actively participated in certain civil defense exercises. For example, in April 1953 the Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense and other states coordinated with the 5th Army out of Chicago as well as units of the 10th Air Force to conduct ‘Operation Wake-Up’. Officials purported this exercise to be the first combined civilian/military drill for the area designated “West-Central Great Plains Area”⁵⁶ With Milwaukee as one of the targets, the military wished to coordinate with civilian leaders to ensure state governments could adequately protect their citizenry. Communications and warning systems were the focus of the exercise.⁵⁷ Similarly ‘Operation Smoothout’ tested the civil air defense warning system on December 18, 1954.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Press Release for Saturday March 28, 1953, “First Joint Civil Defense Exercise For West-Central Great Plains Area.” Box 11, Folder “Test Exercises 1953-1954.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

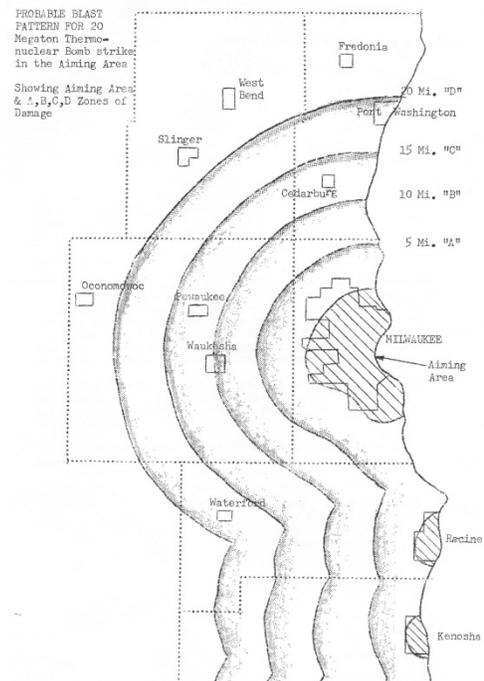
⁵⁸ Ralph J. Olson to E.A. Knuth, December 20, 1954, Box 11, Folder “Test Exercises 1953-1954.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

Additionally, the state did examine civil defense under the perspective of policy.

Governor Walter J. Kohler hosted a conference at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in conjunction with the Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense and the university's Extension Division under a contract with the Federal Civil Defense Administration with the desire of promoting civil defense and discussing it as an issue.⁵⁹ Three of the speakers, George W. Carnachan, George Lyon, and George A. Parkinson represented the Milwaukee civil defense program.⁶⁰ The conference concluded at the time that the state should continue to encourage enthusiasm and involvement as well as promote emergency preparedness through first-aid training at home, in schools, and industry. It also recommended that the scope of state civil defense law grow to encompass natural disasters as well.⁶¹ It was only the Soviet development of the hydrogen bomb that would spur state legislators to action.

iv. The H-Bomb and State Law

The majority of state legislators in Madison continued to show little interest in civil defense until the first detonation of a Soviet hydrogen bomb. This was a true turning point for statewide civil defense. A bomb equivalent to the Hiroshima one would merely devastate a city. With the



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⁵⁹ Walter J. Kohler to Val Peterson, December 4, 1953 (folded inside the "Report to the Federal Civil Defense Administration on the Governor's Conference on Civil Defense"), Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶⁰ Brochure, "Governor's Conference on Civil Defense", "Report to the Federal Civil Defense Administration on the Governor's Conference on Civil Defense, Held in Madison, November 2 and 3, 1953": Appendix 6. Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶¹ The University of Wisconsin Extension Division, Bureau of Government, "Report to the Federal Civil Defense Administration on the Governor's Conference on Civil Defense, Held in Madison, November 2 and 3, 1953": 3-4. Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

hydrogen bomb, an entire city would cease to exist but the damage and the resulting fallout would spread even further.⁶² Now rural parts of Wisconsin had to care; many Wisconsin towns were near big cities such as Milwaukee, the Twin Cities, and Chicago. This allowed for a number of the reforms the Zeidler Administration had pushed for but also limited the power of the city.

The threat of the increased destructive capacity of the hydrogen bomb convinced a majority in the Wisconsin state government that it was finally time to increase the state's role in civil defense. The result was the passage of Chapter 377 of the 1955 statutes, also known as the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1950.⁶³

Chapter 377 was Wisconsin's equivalent to the Federal Civil Defense Act concerning changes in civil defense law; it established rules regulating the state's actions in the event of nuclear attack. It also dictated the responsibilities of municipal and county government during the same scenario, making civil defense mandatory.⁶⁴ The state took other initiatives such as instituting communications systems and emergency control centers, and establishing regions organized for emergency purposes. The state government designated the eleven southeastern-most counties as "Disaster Region No. 1".⁶⁵

This territory was composed of the counties of Milwaukee, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Jefferson, Kenosha, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha.⁶⁶

⁶² Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, "Biennial Report: 1954-1955, 1955-1956": 1. Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶³ Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, "Civil Defense in Wisconsin: A Guide for Local and County Officials in Planning and Developing Their Civil Defense, An Analysis of 1955 Civil Defense Legislation, A Plan of Action," (Madison: The Office, August 1955) 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁶⁵ Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, "Biennial Report: 1954-1955, 1955-1956": 2. Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶⁶ Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area Civil Defense Commission, "Articles of Organization and Mutual Aid Agreement of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area Civil Defense Commission" attached beneath "Resolution

Region I's organizational headquarters was in Watertown and directed state entities such as the Department of Agriculture to do their part for civil defense.⁶⁷ The state considered four areas at the greatest risk for nuclear attack. Region I was of critical importance due to its stature containing roughly half the state's population; the vast majority of it in Milwaukee County. Likewise, it possessed the biggest industrial targets, and at the time contributed 55 percent of the state's tax revenue. Region I was not the only concern.

There were three other areas state leaders felt were at risk. Planners considered Madison a target area due to it being the state's capital. The Green Bay and Fox Valley area were potential targets due to their industry, and the region around Superior and Duluth, Minnesota were at risk as well due to their importance in the Great Lakes shipping of iron ore for steel.⁶⁸

Lawmakers went beyond having their bureaucrats issue edicts and cordon off regions with the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955; lawmakers designated civil defense priorities at both the state and local levels. State management of civil defense was important. However, as stated earlier, local management of civil defense was critical because each locality possessed unique advantages and challenges to implement their own civil defense plans. For the purposes of examining the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955, one may look at it from the dual perspectives of the designated duties of the state and of municipalities.

The Role of the State

The state's formulation of civil defense law was immense and treated civil defense very seriously. During simulations or actual emergencies civil defense officials had to be obeyed upon legal penalty of fine and/or imprisonment. The legislature granted the governor increased

Number." Box 7, Folder "Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶⁷ Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, "Biennial Report: 1954-1955, 1955-1956": 1-4. Box 10, Folder "Reports to or by the governor." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁶⁸ George W. Carnachan to John T. Keeley, July 26, 1957: 1-2. Box 1, Folder 11. Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense: Survival Plans, 1955-1959, Wisconsin Series 1772, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

authority should he declare a state of emergency in an urgent situation. Lawmakers also created the position of state civil defense director who was subordinate to the governor. To provide oversight and guidance of the new director and civil defense activities, the legislature created a civil defense council.⁶⁹

Under Wisconsin law, the legislature granted the governor and, through gubernatorial blessing, the director immense power. The director's basic duty was to provide civil defense leadership to the terms of Wisconsin law, ensure a basic set of state standards were met statewide at the municipal and county levels, and conduct civil defense exercises. The director also received the charge of indicating which highways would receive use for civil defense purposes; with evacuation primarily in mind. The director also had to handle the logistics of mobile units designated to aid various target areas in Wisconsin. He was also the first state official to begin forming agreements of mutual assistance with other states. The director also had the authority to organize the state bureaucracy and form different regions for the management of civil defense. The greatest power granted the state's executive branch, and one most likely to infringe on the civil liberties of individuals, was the power to seize public or private property if necessary in an emergency. These were sweeping changes at the state level, but local government also received dictates to comply with.⁷⁰

The Role of Localities

The state responsibilities formally established, it dictated that all municipalities and counties should establish their own local civil defense programs with a county director if this had not done so already. The law contained criteria for local government to warn the public and

⁶⁹ Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, "Civil Defense in Wisconsin: A Guide for Local and County Officials in Planning and Developing Their Civil Defense, An Analysis of 1955 Civil Defense Legislation, A Plan of Action," 9, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

furnish municipal leadership and resources for their citizens. The state would advise local government, but the law granted municipalities substantial leeway in terms of how civil defense could be implemented.⁷¹ Yet for a big city like Milwaukee, the layout designated by the state was at times limiting.

Above the municipal level, counties were an important level of civil defense governance. Under the order of the state director, all counties were required by law to participate in civil defense simulations, join with the rest of the state in being party to the Wisconsin mobile support program, and join regional civil defense entities and exercises. Under Wisconsin law, the county was of great importance.⁷²

In fact, the state designed the county to be *the* locus for local-level civil defense. The county coordinator received much importance due to the county's position in state civil defense law. Chapter 377 also required every coordinator to integrate the county's varying municipal civil defense organizations as well as serving as the county civil defense executive. Most important of all, the county coordinator served as the intermediary for information between the state and municipal governments.⁷³ The coordinator's responsibilities also extended to the extent of ensuring proper sharing of county resources.⁷⁴ With the county coordinator in such a position of power, the influence of a big-city mayor was diminished.

The law as it was written in practice served to put a large city such as Milwaukee down. In order for Mayor Zeidler to receive information, the news would first have to come to the Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense from the Federal Civil Defense Administration. Zeidler

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5-7, 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁴ Olson, Ralph J., and John W. Fitzpatrick, "Civil Defense Activity Summary for the Military Operations Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations of the House of Representatives," June 25, 1956: 2-3. Box 10, Folder "Reports: Report to Holifield Subcommittee, 1956." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

would then have to wait for the Office of Civil Defense to call or transmit the relevant data. The city was also technically subordinate to the county coordinator. One state official would lament in 1957 how the Office of Civil Defense did not follow the letter of the law and directly interacted with individual municipalities.⁷⁵ Milwaukee sought more influence regardless of the state bureaucracy's implementation of the law.

One way for Milwaukee officials to bypass this was to run the county's civil defense and attempt to centralize it under city control. While Milwaukee co-chaired the county civil defense program with a representative of the county, city leaders at least once attempted to possess the sole chairmanship of the county's planning and operating committee in January 1957. The suburbs soundly rejected such a motion. This was in spite of the Zeidler Administration's argumentation stating the city was not simply attempting to seize control. In terms of a simple chain of command, Zeidler's attempt made sense.⁷⁶ Furthermore, it would be only logical if the primary target and largest entity in the county would possess the chairmanship. However, no self-serving suburb, especially one undergoing territorial legal battles with the city, would so easily surrender to city of Milwaukee authority.

The issue would again surface later that year. In another October regional meeting, the Ozaukee County Board took issue with ceding control of its county civil defense organization under another county or area's authority. The official reporting the events believed the other counties stood in accord as well. The document itself is sparse on details, however one could surmise this was another attempt by the city to centralize control within itself.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ George W. Carnachan to John T. Keeley, July 26, 1957: 3. Box 1, Folder 11. Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense: Survival Plans, 1955-1959.

⁷⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, "City Defense Move Beaten: Co-Chairman Voted, Climaxing some Two Years of Wrangling," January 26, 1957.

⁷⁷ Allan E. Oakey to State Office of Civil Defense, October 9, 1957. Box 7, Folder "Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

It seems logical that various communities will always vie for greater control influence over others, but Milwaukee leaders had to conduct civil defense under the rules laid out by the state legislature. The civil defense laws of 1955 gave communities specific instructions on local duties to their citizens under the stewardship of the state and federal governments. However, before and after the state's major 1955 civil defense legislation, city of Milwaukee-led local government would organize itself in attempt to meet the challenges nuclear war would pose.

v. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission (MMCDC) was a unified attempt by the municipalities of Milwaukee County to cooperate, share resources and manpower, as well as mutually assisting each other in times of emergency. The organization would later grow to become the Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area Civil Defense Commission (MMTACDC) and included several counties in southeast Wisconsin. Such a move would upset some state officials, viewing such an expansion as beyond local government's authority.

The MMCDC began prior to the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955. Section 21.024 (4) of the 1951 Wisconsin Statutes permitted local governments to form mutual aid organizations for civil defense. Taking advantage of this in 1952, the communities of Milwaukee County formed the MMCDC. Its original membership consisted of the governmental entities of all localities within Milwaukee County including the county government as well. With many operational procedures based on plans developed by the Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, the municipalities would collaborate in civil defense planning and practice as well as to cooperate in terms of resource sharing. As part of the commission all municipalities

had to have their own civil defense plans. Each municipality would have at least a third of their resources designated as ‘mobile’ which could be used to support the other municipalities.⁷⁸

The Zones of Milwaukee County

Seizing the initiative for civil emergency readiness, in January 1954, Milwaukee County added another layer of civil defense organization by dividing the county into five zones, each designated with a letter. Acting under the direction of MMCDC, the municipalities within each zone were supposed to function together through mutual cooperation should a manmade or natural disaster arise. The municipalities would share facilities, resources, and manpower to ease the burden on any one municipality. Each zone had its own control center with a coordinator who was designated as higher on the chain of command than each municipal civil defense director.⁷⁹

Each zone’s letter designation was alphabetical beginning in the north and moved southward. Zone A consisted of the north shore suburbs of the villages of Bayside, Brown Deer, and Fox Point, the city of Glendale, and the villages of River Hills, Shorewood, and Whitefish Bay.⁸⁰ Granville too was a part of Zone A until the city of Milwaukee annexed it. Zone B encompassed the city of Wauwatosa. Zone C contained the city of West Allis and the village of West Milwaukee. The villages of Greendale and Hales Corners, the town (now city) of Greenfield, the city of Franklin, and the unincorporated village of St. Martin’s (now part of Franklin) all composed Zone D. Lastly, the cities of Cudahy, South Milwaukee, St. Francis, and Oak Creek made up Zone E. The city of Milwaukee did not have its own zone at the time but

⁷⁸ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, “Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission Organization”: 1-5. Box 7, Folder “Milwaukee Evacuation Plan, 1954-1955.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁷⁹ Zone A Emergency Government, “Zone A Operating Procedure:” 1-4. Box 2, Folder 2. Zone A Emergency Government Records, 1955-1990. Milwaukee Series 33, PH 6508, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI.

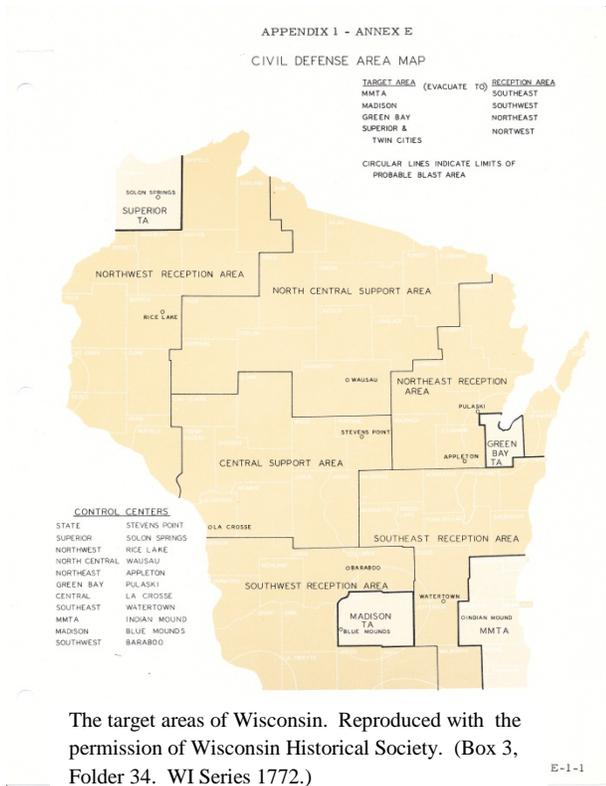
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

co-chaired with a county representative on the MMCDC.⁸¹ The control centers for each zone were respectively in Glendale, Wauwatosa, West Allis, Greendale, and Cudahy.⁸²

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area

Soon after the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955 the MMCDC sought to expand outward. This expansion was to include other counties and create another area for civil defense

organization other than the state's Region I. This region came to be called the Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area (MMTA). Among the reasons for creation, after Operation Alert 1955, a civil defense exercise, the communities of southeast Wisconsin realized that if there was not greater coordination among the southeastern local governments, then there would be a greater potential for disoriented government responses and civilian death in a nuclear emergency.⁸³ The initial MMTA consisted of the counties of



The target areas of Wisconsin. Reproduced with the permission of Wisconsin Historical Society. (Box 3, Folder 34. WI Series 1772.)

Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, Racine, and Waukesha and the municipal governments within them,⁸⁴ but came to include Kenosha County as well.⁸⁵ Reflecting the creation of the

⁸¹ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, "Articles of Organization and Mutual Aid Agreement of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission": 3-4. Box 7, Folder "Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸² Allan E. Oakey to State Office of Civil Defense, February 19, 1958. Box 7, Folder "Metropolitan Target Area (MTA)." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸³ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, "Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission Organization": 1-5. Box 7, Folder "Milwaukee Evacuation Plan, 1954-1955." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸⁴ "A Resolution to provide for the appointment of a committee to prepare a plan for the organization of the Milwaukee Area Civil Defense Authority (Commission)." Box 7, Folder "Milwaukee Evacuation Plan, 1954-1955." Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

MMTA, the MMCDC then changed its name in 1957 to become the Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area Civil Defense Commission (MMTACDC). All counties and their municipalities had equal standing in the organization.⁸⁶

With the MMTA, the MMCDC/MMTACDC would draw the ire of some state officials for duplicating state emergency plans for Region I, attempting to usurp control over the region, and “arrogant[ly]”⁸⁷ infringing upon spheres of state authority.⁸⁸ Not all responses were the same, but the MMTA did generate many questions and some confusion. For instance, Region I’s operational control center was in Watertown, while the MMTA control center was at the Indian Mound Reservation Boy Scout camp outside of Oconomowoc. Which location would have precedence?⁸⁹ Confusion aside, at least some state officials believed working with Region I and the MMTA was feasible.⁹⁰ Despite drawing some indignation from state officials, the MMTACDC continued to operate until all counties but Milwaukee County left the organization in 1962. It would revert back to its former MMCDC name.⁹¹

vi. Spreading the Gospel

Organizations such as the MMCDC/MMTACDC grew out of the efforts of Frank Zeidler and other Milwaukee leaders. Seeing the threat of nuclear war, municipal government had to

⁸⁵ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, “Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission Organization”: 1-5. Box 7, Folder “Milwaukee Evacuation Plan, 1954-1955.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸⁶ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, October 9, 1957.” Box 7, Folder: “Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸⁷ Melvin Larson to Ralph J. Olson, August 23, 1957. Box 7, Folder “Metropolitan Target Area (MTA). Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ George W. Carnachan to Colonel John T. Keeley, July 26, 1957: 1-5. Box 1, Folder 11. Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense: Survival Plans, 1955-1959.

⁹⁰ Carl N. Neupert to General Ralph J. Olson, August 21, 1957. Box 7, Folder “Metropolitan Target Area (MTA).” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

⁹¹ Chairman of Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area Civil Defense Commission to Chairmen, County Boards, and Civil Defense Directors of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, Racine, Waukesha, Kenosha, and Walworth counties, March 5, 1962. Box 7, Folder “Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

have a plan ready. Through examination of problems posed by nuclear war, city leaders implemented a number of solutions to assuage any potential nuclear disaster. Zeidler faced many hurdles against what he perceived as a lackadaisical state legislature, but ultimately obtained a number of his goals. While all of these issues were of importance, even more essential was creating a dialogue of civil defense across the nation. To achieve this Mayor Zeidler had to gain the attention of others through advocating. Using Milwaukee like a petri dish, others in the United States could study civil defense to see how it could be implemented elsewhere.

C. Milwaukee's National Influence

i. Promoting Civil Defense Nationally

Frank Zeidler understood that civil defense was not an undertaking which solely Milwaukee could perfect. City leaders did believe they had devised a plan well advanced of their contemporaries in other cities. Zeidler desired to share what had been learned in Milwaukee for the betterment of other cities and exchange ideas to improve civil defense policy even more. Thus began a national civil defense advocacy.⁹²

One method of doing this was through writing prolifically for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. There the mayor contributed his thoughts on the matter while also keeping abreast of other initiatives nationwide. For instance, from September 25 through the 29, 1950, Chicago conducted a series of civil defense drills which Zeidler used as a lesson for all other cities. He wrote in the *Bulletin* that the drill's most valuable lesson indicated each city had to address civil

⁹² Milwaukee Civil Disaster Relief Committee, "Minutes of Meeting," June 3, 1949. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981.

defense in its own way and there was no plan or method which would universally work for every city. The United States Conference of Mayors on October 5 and 6, of that same year agreed.⁹³

With this in mind, Zeidler advised those following civil defense to study the strengths and weaknesses as well as the target viability of their cities, educate their citizenry, and based on those results, request additional material or financial assistance from their state or Washington. He also gave suggestions for organization based on Milwaukee's model but emphasized that cities had to seize the initiative for themselves.⁹⁴ The concept of self-help, at the individual or municipal level was central to the philosophy of civil defense. Self-help also placed more of the fiscal responsibility onto individuals and localities rather than from the top down.⁹⁵ However, it was from the highest leadership in Washington which the Zeidler Administration desired greater assistance.

ii. Pressure on the Federal Government

As previously mentioned, a problem of significance for the Zeidler Administration was the largely apathetic stance of the Wisconsin state legislature for years. This posed not only issues for city governance from the state but also made it more difficult to work with the federal government. Without going through the state, Milwaukee could not properly receive information from the NSRB due to federal policy. Lacking cooperation in Madison, Mayor Zeidler also pressed the federal government to change its stance.⁹⁶

This problem was not unique to Milwaukee. Zeidler was among the mayors who pushed for the United States Conference of Mayors to pass a resolution appealing to the NSRB to share imperative information directly with both state governors and mayors of large cities. Zeidler and

⁹³ Zeidler, Frank P., "Civil Defense: Community Problems and the NSRB Plan", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 6, no. 11 (November 1950): 337, 341. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost, (accessed October 28, 2011).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 7-8.

⁹⁶ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 251.

other mayors found it an unnecessary burden having to wait for communication from the governor rather than receiving it directly from the federal government. In a potential emergency it would be critical to receive information as promptly as possible. Having the governor as an intermediary would hinder the vital flow of information.⁹⁷ Legislation from Capitol Hill was not immediately forthcoming and in the developmental stage.

iii. Washington Politics

Approximately when the Zeidler Administration entered office, federal planners were at work devising Cold War civil defense policy. While the government had commissioned other reports and studies, the most prominent work to surface was the Hopley Report. Issued to the Secretary of Defense on October 1, 1948,⁹⁸ it recommended a specific design for the structure of civil defense at the municipal and state levels. It simultaneously laid the foundation for and encouraged the creation of a federal civil defense office. The Hopley Report paved the way for a federal policy establishing a chain of command and transfer of information which would be from federal to state to local. To the chagrin of big-city mayors, there would be no direct communication between the federal government and municipalities.⁹⁹

Several months later in March 1949, President Truman assigned the NSRB the task of spearheading national civil defense planning. However, civil defense was not a significant priority for the Truman Administration. As a result, over the course of 1949 and 1950 the NSRB focused on civil defense planning but delegated civil defense tasks within the parameters and capabilities of contemporary government agencies because it could do no more. The lack of

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁹⁹ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 23.

attention to civil defense was evident because only three individuals received tasks to manage civil defense in states and municipalities.¹⁰⁰

Federal apathy began to change and civil defense gained a renewed sense of urgency when the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear weapon on September 23, 1949. Municipal leaders across the country spoke out against lackadaisical federal initiatives. It was around this time that Representative John F. Kennedy made his famous “atomic Pearl Harbor” remarks as well, warning of disaster if the country did not take action.¹⁰¹

Yet fear mongering did not occur on Wells Street at Milwaukee’s City Hall. Publically Mayor Zeidler was unsurprised at the news, telling his city that he received unconfirmed reports a year prior that the Soviets had the bomb. He attempted to assuage Milwaukeeans that the situation merely required “thoughtful analysis”,¹⁰² reassuring the populace that his administration had been preparing for nuclear disaster since he took office. Zeidler thought lowly of any attempts by politicians to instill fear as a result of the recent news. However, he did take the time to promote city decentralization as a potential means of deterring nuclear devastation, something which coincided with his urban planning efforts to expand the city. Despite urging calm to his people, the Milwaukee mayor continued to explore civil defense as a means to protect the city. In light of the international situation and eager to share the Milwaukee civil defense experience, Zeidler sent a representative to Washington DC to promote federal civil defense legislation.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹⁰¹ Kerr, *Civil Defense In the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 25.

¹⁰² *Milwaukee Journal*, “Mayor Calm About A-Bomb, Urges Careful Thought”, September 24, 1949.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

iv. Milwaukee Goes to Washington

Testifying before the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy in was the perfect opportunity for the Zeidler Administration to share the lessons learned in Milwaukee. The testimony also promoted national civil defense policy as well as the city's own agenda. In particular one can note the push for supremacy of the city over both the county and other municipalities. Yet from reading the proceedings one can also ascertain how those committee members speaking used the Milwaukee experience to push-through what ultimately became major civil defense law.

In his testimony on April 3, 1950, Dr. George A. Parkinson represented Milwaukee. At the time, he served as the Civil Disaster Relief Committee Coordinator as well as a captain in the Navy Reserves. Parkinson informed the Joint Congressional Committee on the philosophy and organization of the Milwaukee Plan and its basis under the Hopley Report. To show the effectiveness of proper coordination, he also listed a number of situations in which elements of the civil defense program were utilized within the preceding two years. Such instances included the July 27, 1949 flash flood which disabled Milwaukee's Riverside pumping station and the coordination between the fire department and the Coast Guard to rescue a downed civil air patrol plane in Lake Michigan on March 4, 1950. Parkinson also detailed the city fire department's coordination with the Red Cross, noting how a fire in the city's sixth ward on March 24, 1950 which killed three people and caused homelessness for approximately ninety more. The coordination of these government agencies validated the civil defense tenet of cooperation.¹⁰⁴

Yet up until that time, few states, including Wisconsin, possessed a civil defense program. Parkinson testified that he believed the reason for such a failure was due to state

¹⁰⁴ United States Congress, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, "Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack: Hearing before the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Congress of the United States, Eighty-First congress, Second Session on Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack, Part 5; April 3, 1950", (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950) 132-133.

legislators not sensing the dilemma posed by nuclear weapons. Furthermore, rural areas of Wisconsin were not inclined to sympathize with the needs of the city because rural areas had fewer risks of being bombed in a time of war.¹⁰⁵

After Parkinson lodged the complaint about rural communities, he turned the tables on the committee and asked of his own. This was under the direction of Mayor Zeidler,¹⁰⁶ Parkinson asked whether or not the federal government would take the initiative in formulating a civil defense policy for the states to follow requiring the states to assist municipalities. While unconventional the committee took the role reversal in stride. In fact, from the testimony it one can discern that the chairman actively encouraged Parkinson.¹⁰⁷

The Chairman, Senator Brien McMahon of Connecticut, responded that indeed the federal government had taken some action. Any information would be available through the NSRB. Parkinson replied that information such as the Hopley Report was indeed available to leaders in Milwaukee but the report had not been established as policy. Milwaukee's leadership desired greater influence from Washington and the implementation of the Hopley Report as federal policy but objected due to the NSRB not communicating directly with the mayor's office. Toeing the line held in Washington, McMahon reasserted to Parkinson that the government policy regarding NSRB communication would not change. The NSRB fundamentally had to communicate solely with the state governments rather than municipalities to preserve the federalist nature of the United States and respect the authority of state governments. The only problem, Parkinson posited, was that that the leadership in Madison had little initiative for civil

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰⁶ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem," 250.

¹⁰⁷ United States Congress, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, "Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack: Hearing before the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Congress of the United States, Eighty-First congress, Second Session on Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack, Part 5; April 3, 1950," 134.

defense. McMahon capitalized on Parkinson's sentiments by articulating that with the states' rights also accompanied a duty to their citizenry.¹⁰⁸

The Navy reservist did not end his inquiry with one question but continued. Parkinson desired to know Washington's policy in regards to whether or not population centers were defensible and the nature of the weapons and tactics which could feasibly be used against Milwaukee and other cities in wartime. Parkinson also expressed a desire for city leadership to know how to manage public fears and maintain order in the event of nuclear war. Senator William Knowland of California stepped in, agreeing with Parkinson. Knowland cited that no governor or state government could possibly answer those questions nor directly address the issues posed. The chairman returned the question to Parkinson. At this point Parkinson argued the only way to save lives was full evacuation of a given city. Knowing the city would have to evacuate, Parkinson maintained the position that the city ought not bear the burden by itself. He argued for distribution of the debt burden amongst the communities surrounding big cities.¹⁰⁹

Before concluding his testimony, Parkinson pressed on appealing for the creation of state and federal civil defense organizations. Within those organizations he expressed a desire for the framework to restrain the efforts of other governmental entities such as those at the county level which may hinder the efforts of the cities. He also gave recommendations to the committee, advising the use of the Hopley Report as the template for civil defense policy, requested the establishment of a federal clearinghouse for the exchange of ideas, inquired into the feasibility of establishing a uniform set of procedures and equipment nationwide, asked for the federal government to explore whether city governments should decentralize its functions and disperse its populations and industries, and probed as to which government entity would cover the costs

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 135-137.

of civil defense. Parkinson's questions and suggestions yielded additional discourse before the Chairman thanked Parkinson for his testimony and commended the work accomplished in Milwaukee by saying, "I want to congratulate you on all the sensible planning work that you people have done in Milwaukee. It is really, I think, quite exceptional."¹¹⁰ Parkinson's testimony was a contributing factor to federal legislation.¹¹¹

v. Implications of the Federal Civil Defense Act

The Zeidler Administration's testimony regarding civil defense in Milwaukee influenced support for the passage of the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950 and the contents of the legislation. Passed in Congress before the New Year,¹¹² the measure was federal lawmakers' attempt to safeguard the American populace. The law called for the government to mitigate the destructive capacity of nuclear war by having government ready before, during, and after a potential enemy strike. Localities through the direction of the states and the counsel of the federal government would formally establish regulations and procedures. The effect of these policies would have necessary stockpiles of supplies in place, aid in the construction of fallout shelters, organize effective responses to nuclear attacks, and ensure government services would be prepared for the aftermath of a bombing in terms of welfare, cleanup, and reconstruction.¹¹³

Civil defense would be a local initiative directed from the state governments for a few reasons. Studies of World War II suggested the most successful responses to bombings were as a result of local organization of trained respondents. Furthermore, it spoke more to the traditional American character for the individual to take initiative locally.¹¹⁴ Some officials in

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137-139.

¹¹² McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 15.

¹¹³ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 27-28.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

government argued greater federal involvement was un-American and too much like the communism practiced in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵

With the federal government providing a guiding role over state and local civil defense programs, the language of the Federal Civil Defense Act called for the creation of the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) as an independent executive agency. Congress tasked the FCDA to design civil defense programs and emergency plans based on studies testing the viability of different procedures. Other federal entities would carry out these programs and plans. It was also the FCDA's duty to provide advanced warning of an imminent attack to the general public, advise state civil defense programs and provide training, persuade states to cooperate further with civil defense efforts, provide federal surplus materials for civil defense, and financially support specific civil defense programs in states and localities.¹¹⁶

Coinciding with the FCDA was the creation of the Civil Defense Advisory Council. The Senate legislated the Council's existence to appease the concerns of local interests who feared the state governments would not always represent their interests. Composed of twelve members, it served in a consultative capacity for the FCDA. State and local governments received three representatives each by presidential appointment. The president received recommendations from the United States Conference of Mayors, the American Municipal Association, the Governors' Conference, and the Council of State Governments.¹¹⁷

A major issue local leaders had with the new legislation was the fact that the federal government would not work directly with cities, but only through the state governments. The intention of this by federal lawmakers was to not usurp the power of the states and preserve the federalist nature of the union. Local leaders, including Zeidler, thought of it as ridiculous that

¹¹⁵ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 29.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

municipal leadership had to work through their respective state capitals rather than receive direct information from Washington.¹¹⁸

Before the Act's passage Zeidler had been among those leaders advocating direct local communication with the federal government to streamline contact especially in emergency situations.¹¹⁹ Being disappointed, Milwaukee's mayor joined the chorus of the American Municipal Association, condemning this part of the Act as "sheer folly"¹²⁰ for it would potentially inhibit any city's attempts to protect itself through direct cooperation with the federal government if the city's state government was disinterested. Zeidler himself complained that the state governments were dominated by rural interests less inclined to the plight of cities and relatively apathetic to plausible nuclear devastation.¹²¹

vi. Widespread Influence

The extent of Frank Zeidler's position in the world of civil defense nor the image of Milwaukee as a model cannot be understated. Federal planners chose Milwaukee as a case study due to The city and the FCDA commissioned three important studies of Milwaukee. The FCDA used Milwaukee's example to write two federal manuals for leaders in other cities to follow. Having his city in the spotlight propelled Zeidler to fame. From across the United States he received requests for advice and to present at various speaking engagements.

By 1954, the federal government had long noticed Frank Zeidler's efforts. As a result, the FCDA collaborated with the city, Milwaukee County, and the Wisconsin state government to research information critical to civil defense. The survey combined two studies. Finished in November 1954, the primary was known as "An Evacuation Study of the Milwaukee

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Zeidler, "A Mayor Looks at the Civil Defense Problem", 251.

¹²⁰ Zeidler, Frank P., "Local Government Looks at the Civil Defense Act", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 7, no. 2 (February 1951): 57. *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost*, (accessed November 17, 2011).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Metropolitan Area” which became the basis for the technical manual FCDA TM-27-1 “Procedure for Evacuation Traffic Movement Studies.” While the secondary “A Plan for Highway Supervision during Civil Defense Emergencies and Mass Movement of Population in Milwaukee, Wisconsin” became the FCDA technical manual TM-27-2 “Planning and Organizing for Civil Defense Traffic Operations.” Described as “pioneering”¹²² by the FCDA, these studies, alongside the so-called Sutermeister Report,¹²³ helped form the basis for Milwaukee’s evacuation planning. When the government made the results of the study public, its press release announced Milwaukee could evacuate 800,000 people in merely three hours. FCDA Administrator Val Peterson made the dubious claim that the survey was “realistic if conservative”¹²⁴ but it was a way to get attention.¹²⁵

Following up the studies, in December 1954 Zeidler was one of the keynote speakers at a conference on national security in Washington DC. Here the mayor of Milwaukee spoke alongside officials of high rank in the federal government. President Eisenhower opened the conference and was followed by the likes of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Arthur W. Radford, FCDA Administrator Val Peterson, and others. Presenting to municipal leaders from across the country, Zeidler explained the results of Milwaukee’s publicized evacuation study. This time around the mayor stated the survey believed seven hours was sufficient to fully evacuate the city but lamented that there would likely only be an alert of two hours from any Soviet attack. Saying there was still work to do, he encouraged his fellow leaders to persuade their residents on the necessity of civil defense. It was

¹²² Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Survival Plan News and Information Digest,” Number 1. Box 1, Folder 1. Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense, Survival Plans, 1955-1959.

¹²³ Sutermeister, Oscar, “Reduction of Vulnerability in the Milwaukee Area: An Exploratory Study by Oscar Sutermeister.”

¹²⁴ “FCDA Says Traffic Study Shows Way to Evacuate Milwaukee.” Box 7, Folder “Milwaukee Evacuation Plan, 1954-1955.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

indeed a great honor to speak in Washington beside prominent federal officials, but Zeidler did not cease his activity there.¹²⁶

Throughout his mayoralty he was active in the civil defense community, participating in organizations and answering queries. Zeidler took the opportunity to observe a nuclear detonation at the Nevada Test Site.¹²⁷ He at least once received a request for advice from the League of California Cities on the organization's development of civil defense programs in California.¹²⁸ Zeidler even sat on the board of directors of the Civil Defense Research Associates (CDRA),¹²⁹ later the National Institute for Disaster Mobilization (NIDM),¹³⁰ an East Coast-based think-tank with a purpose obvious in the title. These are only a few examples, but they clearly illustrate Zeidler's national prominence in the field of civil defense. The Milwaukee mayor owed his prominence directly from the spearheading and advocacy efforts of his administration.

D. Conclusion

From beginning as a means to thwart an incident such as the Texas City Disaster, Milwaukee's emergency preparedness evolved into civil defense due to Cold War tensions. This was a necessity because the city had a large population, high population density, and possessed an immense concentration of industry. Seeing little done, Mayor Frank Zeidler and his administration designed the Milwaukee Plan, conducted studies, and began implementation while learning along the way.

¹²⁶ Federal Civil Defense Administration, "A Report on the Washington Conference of Mayors and Other Local Government Executives on National Security, December 2-3, 1954," 1, 3, 19, 30, 40-43.

¹²⁷ Zeidler, Frank P., "Civil Defense and the Nevada Tests," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 8, no. 6 (Aug 1952) 204.

¹²⁸ Harry H. Stoops to Frank P. Zeidler, November 8, 1954. Box 54, Folder 8. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981.

¹²⁹ Civil Defense Research Associates, "Directors and Officers," 1955-1956. Box 54, Folder 9. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981.

¹³⁰ S.A. Anthony Jr. to Frank Zeidler, August 14, 1959. Box 54, Folder 9. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981.

Milwaukee's city leaders had to contend with rural disinterest in the Wisconsin legislature. Each passage of civil defense legislation was only a minor victory. It was not until the Soviet detonation of the Hydrogen Bomb that the legislature passed Chapter 377 of the 1955 Statutes. This Wisconsin Civil Defense Act vastly expanded state and local powers for civil defense. The state government and municipalities had clearly defined roles. The state would provide support and guidance while the localities would follow general guidelines to implement according to their own needs.

Lack of state action would not stop the city of Milwaukee and its neighbors from organizing amongst themselves. The municipalities of Milwaukee County formed the Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission which coordinated county civil defense programs. The designation of zones in Milwaukee County grew out of the MMCDC's collaborative nature. The principles of mutual aid magnified beyond Milwaukee County with the regional Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area; encompassing the six counties around Milwaukee County.

Leaders in Milwaukee knew their city had a program that few other cities possessed. City officials felt they had to actively promote civil defense for Milwaukee's sake and the betterment of all urban Americans. Zeidler used publications such as the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and organizations such as the United States Conference of Mayors to champion civil defense.

He exerted pressure on the Wisconsin state and federal governments, going so far as to send a representative to testify in favor of the Federal Civil Defense Act's enactment. Through the conduct of studies Milwaukee helped design federal policies on evacuation, giving Zeidler a topic of importance to present before municipal leaders from all corners of the United States.

Zeidler became a strong figure in the civil defense community. Thanks to the efforts of his administration, he gained notoriety. Frank Zeidler became not just a leader of his city, but a leader of national significance. Under the Zeidler Administration, others looked to the city of Milwaukee to develop their own programs. In terms of planning, Milwaukee was archetypal for civil defense.

II. Problems of Implementation

A. Introduction

While Milwaukee was a model city, good policy does not always translate well into practice. In spite of all the efforts put forth by the Zeidler Administration, civil defense was plagued with issues. This difficulty stemmed out of a number of issues from the very beginning. As previously stated, rural interests in Wisconsin had little inclination toward civil defense prior to the passage of the civil defense laws of 1955. Yet even within the city many individuals were disinterested in civil defense for reasons including its futility, the perception of its contribution to militarism, and the conception that civil defense was solely the government's duty.

At the governmental level there were problems of implementation in the bureaucracy and operation in the field. Bureaucratically, civil defense in Milwaukee received its own public agency which in turn worked in conjunction with other governmental organs. Yet as this section will demonstrate, the established government bureaucracy was not up to the task when it came time for implementation. Even assuming total bureaucratic preparedness, from a practical standpoint it is difficult if not impossible for one to prepare for nuclear war. How could anyone comprehend all of the assorted variables involved in attempting to successfully evacuate a major city before a nuclear attack? The ability to even respond to the destructive capacity of atomic warfare is and was questionable. For this reason many contemporaries questioned the viability of civil defense endeavors. Furthermore, many scholars who have examined civil defense have shared this perspective as well. The author of this project does not attempt to diverge from the general scholarly consensus but rather seeks to illustrate these issues at the level closest and most visible to the everyday person.

Despite extraordinary efforts on the part of Milwaukee policymakers to make civil defense an effective government service, in the field it suffered from public apathy and

skepticism which only hindered the dubious practical application of civil defense policies. Contemporary documents show how government bureaucrats experienced difficulty in keeping the public and industry on board with civil defense and implementing their programs themselves. An analysis of civil defense test exercises like Operation Alert shed even more doubt on civil defense's practical application as a public policy.

B. Apathy and Resistance

i. General Disregard

Popular opinion was something against which civil defense officials faced adversity. Leaders found it difficult to rally the proper support from the civilian populace and industry. This issue continued to vex supportive policymakers and bureaucrats attempting to garner popular support.

Data at the time suggests a majority of the public supported civil defense, at least in theory. One study in 1952 conducted in eleven cities indicated the public wanted to know more about civil defense and see what the federal government was doing.¹³¹ Another in 1965 suggested at least 71 percent wanted heavy federal involvement in a civil defense program. The catch was the public supported it in principle, but did not believe it important enough to get involved in. Much of the public saw it as an issue for the government to handle.¹³²

Lukewarm support was evident in Milwaukee. In 1954, Deputy Civil Defense Director George A. Parkinson complained that up until the public information release of the Soviet

¹³¹ Ralph J. Olson to All Local Civil Defense Directors, May 2, 1952. Box 152, Folder 5. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981.

¹³² Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 138-140.

hydrogen bomb detonation, there had been a “log jam of public apathy”¹³³ that he believed had finally been broken. The evidence strongly suggests he was mistaken.

Leaders of Zone A in Milwaukee County cancelled an evacuation test scheduled for June 15, 1955 due to a lack of public interest. Only 46 vehicle owners agreed to participate. One suggested reason cited the local high school graduation as a deterrent of popular attendance.¹³⁴

Advance eight years later to 1963 and little had changed; despite the passing of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In a January MMCDC meeting, the commission spent much time discussing the availability of fallout shelters, the plausibility of stocking the shelters, and the placement of signs indicating each shelter’s location. Milwaukee County deemed 476 structures suitable for fallout shelters but required permission from the owners. A rough plurality of 58 percent agreed. 20 percent outright declined while another 22 percent was undecided. The county sent out requests to every owner but had an affirmative rate of only 58 percent.¹³⁵

Industry too was generally not against civil defense, but often found itself too busy to bother with it. Milwaukee’s Allen-Bradley Company (now Rockwell Automation) did request civil defense information kits as late as 1961,¹³⁶ and companies worked with both the city of Milwaukee and the state of Wisconsin to address civil defense matters. The Milwaukee Gas Light Company studied the probable nuclear blast effects on gas lines and went so far as to assemble its own committee to address the matter.¹³⁷ However, it would not get in the way of

¹³³ Parkinson, George A., “Civil Defense: A New Look,” April 16, 1954. Box 11, Folder “Safety-Industrial Defense, 1951-1961.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

¹³⁴ “Minutes of Meeting, Civil Defense Zone A, Glendale City Hall,” June 7, 1955. Box 2, Folder 2. Zone A Emergency Government Records, 1955-1990.

¹³⁵ Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission, “Minutes of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Civil Defense Commission,” January 24, 1963. Box 2, Folder 2. Zone A Emergency Government Records, 1955-1990.

¹³⁶ Joseph C. Quinlan to Elbert Yee, March 15, 1961. Box 11, Folder “Safety-Industrial Defense, 1951-1961.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

¹³⁷ Erwin C. Brenner to Ralph J. Olson, April 24, 1951. Box 11, Folder “Safety-Industrial Defense, 1951-1961.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

business. During a civil defense trial, planners desired factories to conduct literal or simulated plant evacuations or shutdowns. To their regret the report stated:

Our greatest weakness lies in the fact that top management generally speaking has been unwilling to face up to the realities of the situation and to initiate the studies and actions necessary to provide maximum protection for their personnel and equipment. It has been said that top management simply does not realize what needs to be done and it might also be said that top management appears too busy to find out.¹³⁸

Public and industrial disengagement posed one problem. However, bureaucrats also had to contend with the greater challenge of maintaining the support of lawmakers at the risk facing budget cuts or dissolution.

ii. Political Opposition

During the height of civil defense there was always significant political dissent at the state and federal levels. Section I indicated in several instances how the Zeidler Administration faced resistance from the state legislature due to rural interests. It never entirely ceased. For instance, while the Wisconsin Civil Defense Act of 1955 was a fairly recent issue that September, when Major General Ralph J. Olson, the state civil defense director, requested an additional \$90,468 to place evacuation signs, lawmakers were not immediately forthcoming. While this particular instance could have been an exception or simply wrangling by a minority of politicians, signs for evacuation routes would have been imperative for evacuating the general public. Fully committed politicians would not hesitate to allocate the necessary funds.¹³⁹

There were similar challenges at the federal level. When President Truman appealed for an appropriation of \$1.5 billion for civil defense, Congress only allocated \$153 million. When a national fallout shelter program was the subject of debate, some lawmakers stood entirely opposed to such an idea. Due to ideology and/or fiscal frugality, some politicians likened such a program as a communist venture only the Soviet Union would undergo. Representatives in

¹³⁸ Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, "Operation Alert 1957," (Milwaukee: The Administration, 1957) 9.

¹³⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, "Board Cool to CD Signs: State Funds Asked," September 21, 1955.

Congress instead reinforced the 'self-help' notion of personal responsibility.¹⁴⁰ What surely did not benefit the political support of civil defense programs were the contradictions inherent to their philosophy.

iii. Paradoxical Arguments

Antithetical principles behind civil defense contributed to apathy and resistance. Planners attempted to spur public interest in civil defense through scare tactics. If Americans were terrified enough of the destructive capacity of atomic bombs, then they would take the initiative to prepare their homes and families for disaster. The contradiction lay in the notion that nuclear war was devastating in terms of death and destruction of property but more lives would be spared and less property destroyed through the intervention of government-led civil defense. Even as the explosive yield from nuclear weapons increased with technological developments, the government's message promoting survivability became ever stronger.¹⁴¹

While a major argumentative flaw, there were other imperfections in government reasoning. One reflected the fact that civilians ran the military-guided Federal Civil Defense Administration. Another was the fact that Americans received assurances that the military would protect them but simultaneously had to not rely on its help should an emergency arise. All of these paradoxes and more undermined public interest.¹⁴² Despite these difficulties, civil defense had practical issues in the field as well.

C. Practical Dilemmas in Operation Alert

Nothing illustrates the technical problems of civil defense more than its attempted implementation in the civil defense exercises known as Operation Alert (OPAL); a simulated response in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack. It was within these exercises where all the

¹⁴⁰ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 23-25, 41.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29, 35-39.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 38.

legislation, policy, and bureaucratic preparation should have come to fruition; but upon reading the reports of these exercises it is hard for one to have confidence in any governmental response.

Milwaukee was not unique in playing a part of Operation Alert. At the behest of the federal government, from 1954 through 1961 between 50 and 100 cities annually participated in this mock drill which tested emergency preparations. OPAL simulated a total Soviet nuclear offensive designed to destroy the United States' ability to wage war and produce goods. This endeavor was not merely local, but extended to the highest levels of the federal government as well and even included the public participation of President Eisenhower in 1955.¹⁴³

i. Civil Defense Nationwide in Practice

Yet this was not simply a military-like war game solely for government readiness. Sociologist Guy Oakes has described Operation Alert as “an elaborate national sociodrama that combined elements of mobilization for war, disaster relief, the church social, summer camp, and the county fair.”¹⁴⁴ As it progressed, federal leaders meant for Operation Alert to be much more expansive and to involve the public at large. With civic and governmental involvement, these drills were conducted to study the efficacy of civil defense procedures. The simulations would allow leaders to see what government and society could do to cope with a nuclear attack and hopefully save lives.¹⁴⁵

Operation Alert evolved from year to year growing in complexity as planners learned via practice. OPAL 1954 was merely an appraisal of civil defense groups and emergency services. In 1955 it expanded to the national scene. The Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) attracted extensive media coverage to promote their efforts, including the public participation of President Eisenhower, his cabinet, and much of the executive branch who relocated outside of

¹⁴³ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 84-85.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

Washington. OPAL 1956 was the most realistic to date in forcing government officials and the general public to face practical issues involved in the nuclear bombing of a city. Leaders assumed there would be no advanced warning and as Oakes reports, casualty and damage reports were more plausible as to what likely would have occurred in a real scenario.¹⁴⁶

Evolving from previous years, OPAL 1957 grew more complex with additional factors for leaders to deal with. It was conducted in three stages. The first began in June with a mock international crisis building up to the brink of war. The FCDA added realism to the test by not specifying ahead of time when the Soviet ‘strike’ would occur. However, the FCDA allowed leaders to assume there was a general buildup and mobilization for war. The Soviet ‘attack’ came on July 12 through July 14 as the second stage. Finally, the third stage from July 15 to 19 was reconstruction. Local civil defense groups bore the responsibility of collecting all data concerning simulated destruction and casualties. The federal government required localities to forward that data upward to the FCDA.¹⁴⁷

ii. Milwaukee’s Implementation

Examining OPAL 1957 can serve as a case study of Operation Alert and general civil defense in the Milwaukee area. This analysis can provide insight into the thoroughness of how well thought out the simulations were as well as the extent to which planners went to prepare for what they saw as likely inevitable. One can also see how Operation Alert was a “sociodrama”¹⁴⁸ as Sociologist Guy Oakes writes in *The Imaginary War* and an exercise in theatrics as Scholar Tracy Davis contends in *Stages of Emergency*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-89, 92-93.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 84.

¹⁴⁹ Davis, *Stages of Emergency*, 2, 4.

After years of meticulous planning, Milwaukee and its surrounding communities participated in the first nationwide exercise known as OPAL 1955. Planners had devised a fully mapped out evacuation strategy with designated routes for evacuees which was based off the Sutermeister Report. During the city's first trial in 1955, civil defense officials encountered an array of problems. These included among other things inadequacy of necessary supplies and logistics, ill prepared city personnel, communications nightmares, industrial disinterest, confusion stemming from an apparent de-emphasis in shelters, and lack of coordination among the various municipalities of Milwaukee County. There were clearly many hurdles for leaders to overcome before the city could consider itself prepared for nuclear war.¹⁵⁰

Some things had changed by 1957. The author of this project has not been able to track down a record of OPAL 1956, but planners believed they had learned some lessons from past practice. They sought to apply new solutions in 1957. However, in OPAL 1957, civil defense organizers also faced the challenge of not knowing when the hypothetical attack was to occur. As previously mentioned, the federal government was quiescent on any details except when it felt the time was right for localities to know. Planners in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area decided to not be bothered with federal secrecy. Instead they elected to plan a simulation of their own coinciding with the federal one to ensure, in their minds, the most realistic test possible.¹⁵¹

Ground zero for the drill was the 'primary control center' located on the far western edge of the city in a firehouse basement at 88th Street and Lisbon Avenue. The alternative control

¹⁵⁰ Carleton, Don E., "Operation Alert 1955: A Report of Participation by the City of Milwaukee in the National Civil Defense Test Exercise of June 15-16," (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, 1955.) 3-4, 7-9.

¹⁵¹ Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, "Operation Alert 1957," (Milwaukee: The Administration, 1957.) 1.

center was at the Indian Mound Reservation. This was a Boy Scout camp outside of Oconomowoc managed by the Milwaukee County Boy Scout Council.¹⁵²

As part of the drill there were a number of underlying assumptions before the government undertook its simulation exercises. Going with the script, they assumed that on July 8, due to a hypothetical deterioration in international relations, the federal government announced the plausibility of war and recommended a general evacuation of the cities as part of a “strategic alert.”¹⁵³ By 9:00 AM on Friday July 12, Milwaukee County ‘evacuated’ 451,500 people including those in need of assistance such as hospital patients. By 10:45 AM the military sent warnings across national communications indicating the approach of enemy planes. Any Soviet attack on North America would have planes flying over the Arctic Circle toward northern American cities.¹⁵⁴

The Operation Alert 1957 report indicates personnel in Milwaukee’s city hall evacuated within five minutes and relocated to the emergency government location at St. John’s Military Academy in Delafield. During the simulation officials took position along evacuation routes during this period which officials referred to as the ‘tactical evacuation.’ During this time planners counted on an additional 173,000 people escaping with their lives. At 12:45 enemy bombers were thirty minutes outside of the city. Anyone still remaining received a signal to find shelter. However, anyone outbound in their cars should have carried on with the evacuation. At 1:37 the control center at 88th and Lisbon lost power and communications. Clearly a bomb must have detonated. Upon realizing this, the alternative control center at Indian Mound Reservation spurred to action. At the Boy Scout camp, civil defense staff received reports concerning the

¹⁵² *Milwaukee Journal*, “Defense Test Plans Ready,” July 11, 1957. ; Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, “Operation Alert 1957,” 2, Annex IV.C.1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, Annex IV.C.1.

¹⁵⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, “Defense Test Plans Ready,” July 11, 1957. ; Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, “Operation Alert 1957,” 2, Annex IV.C.1.

bomb. A nuclear detonation with a yield greater than five megatons occurred in the air over 37th Street and Wisconsin Avenue. This area is just to the northwest of the Menomonee Valley, near the present Miller Park baseball stadium. At the time there was a heavy concentration of industry along the Menomonee River. The air burst would ensure a greater area of destruction over such an area.¹⁵⁵

In the aftermath of the ‘explosion,’ simulators estimated 284,728 were dead in the county with another 87,771 wounded. In the rest of the metropolitan target area, the combined casualties from Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha, and Racine counties were 2,200 dead and 2,675 wounded while Kenosha County was unscathed. Tens of thousands more were initially unharmed but received radiation exposure. 40 percent of them would die within two weeks. The majority of the 624,500 individuals who survived with merely the clothes on their back would have been homeless. Approximately 60,000 of those were estimated to not possess the resources to care for themselves and would require government assistance of 180 tons of food per day. Statewide Madison suffered 71,100 deaths with 21,500 injured while Superior had been “wiped out”.¹⁵⁶ Ten days later Milwaukee’s government in exile directed recovery efforts out of St. John’s Military Academy in Delafield as radiation levels subsided.¹⁵⁷

In the Milwaukee report of the exercise, reviewers recommended changes in protocol at the primary control center at 88th and Lisbon. At the alternative control center, the report raved how helpful the Boy Scout leadership was but lamented the unreliability of their portable communications systems. Furthermore, they recommended the construction of a facility resistant to explosions at Lapham Peak. This would also serve as a better communications spot

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, “Operation Alert 1957,” 2-3.

¹⁵⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, “285,000 ‘Die’ as City Acts in Raid Test,” July 13, 1957.

¹⁵⁷ Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, “Operation Alert 1957,” Annex IV.C.4; *Milwaukee Journal*, “285,000 ‘Die’ as City Acts in Raid Test,” July 13, 1957.

due to its higher elevation. Overall, despite several listed complications, reviewers believed the MMTA to have a reliable administrative civil defense plan.¹⁵⁸

When it came to individual services, however, results were decidedly mixed. The police, fire, engineering, rescue, medical departments required additional planning and training. Communications coordination was lackluster and staff lacked training. Welfare, defined by readiness to feed and care for refugees, received great praise. Industry received a poor grade due to its lack of interest to participate.¹⁵⁹

Industry may have been a sour apple, but the umpire of the Milwaukee area's drill, Major Donald Zink, thought of the overall exercise differently. He wrote of the exercise as an "outstanding success"¹⁶⁰ because government leaders were actively addressing the civil defense problem, enthusiasm was high, and the simulation "was designed to fail."¹⁶¹ He downplayed the problems experienced during the simulation and thought of it as a step in the right direction. Concurring, Milwaukee Civil Defense Director Brigadier General Don E. Carleton described OPAL 1957 as "a marked advance in civil defense planning".¹⁶²

Not everyone held this view. The subsequent *Milwaukee Journal* article "Friction Here Marks Bombing Attack Drill" suggested otherwise. There was an apparent mishap in communication between the local control center and regional command in Watertown. The two sides did not properly exchange information with each other. Naturally, each side blamed the other. Regional coordinator Allan E. Oakey criticized Milwaukee by alleging he received more information about the exercise from the *Journal* than during the actual exercise.¹⁶³ Perhaps part

¹⁵⁸ Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, "Operation Alert 1957," Preface, 9, 32.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Preface, 9, 32.

¹⁶³ *Milwaukee Journal*, "Friction Here Marks Bombing Attack Drill," July 14, 1957.

of the problem was the area's decision to conduct its own simulation. Within the Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense collection, enclosed in the copy of the OPAL 1957 report, contains a letter from Carleton to his superior apologizing for any confusion caused by the switch and suggesting the MMTA might conduct its own practice separate from the national one in 1958.¹⁶⁴

iii. The Efficacy of Civil Defense

Upon reading the results today, a reader may not share such a rosy view of the transpired events. Sociologist Guy Oakes, when writing about Operation Alert described it as turning the unfathomable obliteration of a city into a problem which officials could handle with proper practice and forethought: "Daunting but manageable, it could be solved by relying on strengths and deploying strategies that were institutionalized in the pre-attack world of American life. As a result, the terrors of an open and undetermined future were dissolved."¹⁶⁵ This begs the question, can anyone truly prepare for such disaster? Assuming such a scenario occurred with sufficient warning time, had OPAL 1957 been an actual disaster, there was too much confusion amongst local officials and public servants to have an effective response. Petty bickering publicly reported by the *Milwaukee Journal* sufficiently indicates this. Both sides did not fully comprehend the situation as it was developing.¹⁶⁶

Beyond the *Journal* article, the OPAL 1957 Milwaukee report was riddled with items listed from various commentators. While everyone wrote positively, numerous policies needed development. Officials needed additional supplies, many workers were ill prepared, and the exercise often lacked effective communication. These things tied together would have made an effectively organized emergency response likely impossible to implement. The writers who

¹⁶⁴ Brigadier General Don E. Carleton to Major General Ralph J. Olson, July 29, 1957, inside the "Operation Alert 1957" report, Box 3, Folder 2. "Wisconsin Office of Civil Defense: Survival Plans, 1955-1959."

¹⁶⁵ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 104.

¹⁶⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, "Friction Here Marks Bombing Attack Drill," July 14, 1957.

rated the exercise a success did so under the basis that its participants were enthusiastic and tried very hard. Unfortunately, in a crisis situation like a nuclear disaster, strong motivation and effort will not change the fact that a city would be annihilated. Many people would be dying or dead. OPAL 1955 and OPAL 1957 exhibited many of the same problems. Looking more to the present, one needs only examine the case of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. FEMA found it difficult to effectively respond to such a disaster and received harsh criticism from the general public.¹⁶⁷

One can certainly argue the notion that at least leaders were making an effort to have something in place in the event of nuclear war. The problem with disaster planning on such a scope is due to the fact that there are so many variables and possibilities it is difficult for the human mind to fathom. As economist and political scientist Herbert Simon suggests, the human capacity to solve problems is a limited commodity in the face of complexity and innumerable information. Evacuating a city of 600,000 to 700,000 people is no easy task, not to mention the rest of the metropolitan area. What if people do not follow proper instructions? What if there is mass confusion? Could a traffic accident grind evacuation to a halt? These are but a few potential problems showing the complexity of such a situation.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, it is common sense for military strategists to attack their opponents with the element of surprise. If that were not possible then one would desire to give the enemy the least amount of warning time possible. With airplanes there may be a few hours of warning time, but as Cold War technology progressed to an increasing emphasis on missiles, there would be even less time. For a mayor attempting to evacuate a large city, any meaningful attempt would be futile. Even Mayor Zeidler, basing his opinion off of the 1954 evacuation study of Milwaukee

¹⁶⁷ Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, "Operation Alert 1957," 1-30.

¹⁶⁸ Simon, Herbert A, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press) 49.

lamented to a national conference of mayors that the study's results were less than favorable. Good conditions would require seven hours to evacuate 800,000 of the 1,100,100 in the metropolitan area. The likelihood of such favorability would be negligible.¹⁶⁹

While not everyone in high government shared these views, President Eisenhower and his cabinet were well aware of the limitations of Cold War civil defense and Operation Alert. They privately were skeptical and held civil defense in disdain, thinking of it as “naïve and hopelessly optimistic.”¹⁷⁰ Upon observing the results of OPAL 1957, nationally many people were off guard by the exercise, became agitated and then less likely to follow governmental instructions. In a real scenario, this would have been exacerbated. Paradoxically the government intended OPAL to ease individual fears through learning and preparation, yet the more people learned, the greater the degree of fright. OPAL's failure compounded even further. Those implementing the exercises did so under the premise that by conducting such maneuvers, life could maintain control and quickly return things to normal after a dropping of the bomb. As demonstrated in Milwaukee, the exercise did not indicate such.¹⁷¹

Why then would policymakers allow civil defense as it was to continue if its efficacy had proved doubtful? Historian Laura McEnaney argues civil defense persisted because it allowed politicians to boost their reputations and show the public they were accomplishing something for the good of all.¹⁷² Oakes contends Eisenhower, despite his misgivings, permitted civil defense because it posed as a justification for the American Cold War policy of deterring Soviet advances in Europe and elsewhere through the threat of nuclear force. Would Americans support such an endeavor if civil defense was not in place? Or, for the sake of peace why not

¹⁶⁹ Federal Civil Defense Administration. “A Report on the Washington Conference of Mayors and Other Local Government Executives on National Security, December 2-3, 1954,” 41.

¹⁷⁰ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 148.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 150-154.

¹⁷² McEnaney, Laura, *Civil Defense Begins At Home*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 155.

withdraw from Europe? These were things the American leadership had to consider.¹⁷³

Moreover, OPAL needed to be a success to justify the time and resources of the operation and civil defense in general. It was in the interest of job security for OPAL to show they were doing a good job. Regardless, civil defense's flaws became more pronounced as time progressed.

Preparations were in place as Milwaukee and the nation practiced for the unthinkable. Practice as they did, their procedure soon showed the impracticalities of civil defense policy. For all that planners had accomplished, what they were trying to do was too complex and impractical due to the very nature of what they were attempting to do. In order for their suppositions to work conditions would have to be favorable, and that was something which could not be relied upon. Unfortunately nuclear disaster likely would have overcome Milwaukee's civil defense efforts. Fortunately, nuclear war never happened.

D. Conclusion

Despite exemplary civil defense policy and national leadership, civil defense officials in Milwaukee faced many hurdles like their counterparts across the United States. The general public, while favorable to the idea of civil defense, was not inclined to take action for it. Industry was willing to have some procedures in place, but would not sacrifice profit to simulate civil defense. Political support was often tepid, financially or otherwise. This hampered the efforts of civil defense bureaucrats. But perhaps the greatest challenge was dealing with the inherent paradoxes of civil defense and the impracticalities in the field.

Despite the numerous drawbacks, civil defense served a purpose. Government had an established plan so there was at least something to fall back on should disaster occur. It would have been morally irresponsible and politically foolish to do otherwise. All of these factors would contribute to civil defense's decline, but civil defense would leave a legacy in Milwaukee.

¹⁷³ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 20-21.

III. The Legacy of Civil Defense In Milwaukee

A. Introduction

This project has continually demonstrated the exemplary efforts of Mayor Frank Zeidler and his contemporaries for Milwaukee and the metro area. As this paper has presented throughout, it is clear that Milwaukee served as a model for civil defense planning. The Milwaukee Plan's influence was so powerful that Frank Zeidler himself was a national celebrity within the civil defense community; receiving requests for advice from across the country. The Zeidler Administration and its city's notoriety led it to send representatives to testify before Congress and invitations for Zeidler to give speeches. Despite notoriety for civil defense planning, the same issues of disregard officials had seen elsewhere in the United States could also be observed in Milwaukee. The majority of the public was simply apathetic to civil defense for reasons demonstrated. Furthermore, while government bore the responsibility to implement disaster preparation, attempting to mitigate such a calamitous outcome would have been difficult and likely impossible as seen by issues presented in during the Operation Alert exercises.

Yet civil defense in Milwaukee was not entirely for naught. Byproducts of the Milwaukee civil defense program's influence can still be seen today. The threat of Soviet attack gave city leaders ammunition to rationalize the city's outward expansion as it quarreled with the suburbs for territory. Likewise, the county's highway system is a partial byproduct of civil defense. However, the most direct legacy civil defense produced was its bureaucratic structure. This organization of government persisted well after civil defense's irrelevancy which began in the 1960s. It has evolved to become a part of modern emergency management.

B. The Decline of Civil Defense

The decade of the 1950s was the golden age of civil defense. Yet as the 1960s unfolded, national civil defense grew increasingly irrelevant to American society and politics. One scholar

has argued this shift in public opinion was due to a combination of changing strategic doctrines and public indifference¹⁷⁴ but doubts concerning feasibility also attributed to civil defense's decline.

From a strategic perspective, the principle of mutual assured destruction, which was a constant between the United States and Soviet Union, impaired civil defense. The reasons being for this were due to the notion doubting the viability of civil defense if 100 million people could die in a nuclear exchange.¹⁷⁵ Leaders in Washington including President Eisenhower shared this reasoning due to the fact that with all the possible exigencies in a nuclear conflict one had to “have an infinite number of plans to cover all the contingencies”¹⁷⁶ which as a result precluded the idea of a plausible civil defense program. Were nuclear war to occur, it would have foreseeably been the end of civilization. Eisenhower once commented, “Our imagination could not encompass the situation which would result from an attack on this country involving the explosion of 2000 megatons”¹⁷⁷ which he further explained meant that “[w]ar no longer has any logic whatsoever.”¹⁷⁸ Eisenhower's line of thought was a sentiment shared by many in the general public and hampered the support behind civil defense.

The most serious decline in support from the federal government ranged from 1964 to 1978 but Congress had begun shuffling the civil defense program around even earlier. In 1958 Congress merged the FCDA with the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM). These two entities became the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM). It was no longer a full standing agency but was an executive office of the President. The ODM originally had coordinated

¹⁷⁴ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 134.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷⁶ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 157.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

nonmilitary defense procedures.¹⁷⁹ In 1961 the OCDM then became the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) as a branch of the Department of Defense (DOD) which then in 1964 became a branch of the Department of the Army under the DOD.¹⁸⁰ Despite the bureaucratic limbo, civil defense officials sought to maintain the program as best they could, conserving what had been done through 1960. This was difficult due to meager Congressional funding which only worsened over time. Nonetheless, the OCD attempted to determine national capacity for fallout shelters and keep existing shelters stocked with provisions. By 1971 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) conducted a study of civil defense. It concluded that due to the decline in appropriations for civil defense, the government ought to decide whether or not those in Washington believed civil defense relevant to national policy.¹⁸¹

As the federal civil defense initiative continued to decline, in 1971 a study ordered by President Nixon directed for a study to investigate the plausibility of merging nuclear and natural disaster planning and management. After positive results, Congress responded by creating the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (DCPA) in 1972. Six years later Congress merged the DCPA and an assortment of other federal agencies into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which still exists today.¹⁸²

Over the course of some twenty years civil defense underwent significant bureaucratic changes. The ultimate change was a transition into emergency management. Before these changes had time to occur, civil defense was leaving behind a legacy in Milwaukee.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 89, 118.

¹⁸⁰ National Archives, "Records of the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency [DCPA]," <<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/397.html>> (accessed 12 May, 2012).

¹⁸¹ Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?*, 142-143.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 143-148.

C. Civil Defense and Urban Planning

i. Dispersion and Milwaukee's Expansion

The 1950s was an important decade for the city of Milwaukee. The city faced important issues such as urban decay and insufficient postwar housing, but urban expansion was important as well. The Zeidler Administration aggressively adhered to annexing land adjacent to the city “with military efficiency”¹⁸³ under the ethos of “[g]row or die”.¹⁸⁴ This was done in an effort to retain a base of taxpayers moving out of the city. The city attempting to expand its own borders led to much conflict with neighboring municipalities and communities seeking incorporation within Milwaukee County.¹⁸⁵ Within these politics of expansion lay an element of civil defense strategy: population dispersion.

This decentralization of the city's population, already occurring due to demographic shift, went hand in hand with other initiatives of the Zeidler Administration. Dispersion was, in the long term, the most important civil defense goal for the city of Milwaukee rather than merely evacuation or construction of shelters. Historian Laura McEnaney has argued that Zeidler “a staunch advocate for evacuation”¹⁸⁶ and implied in her work that this was his most favored implementation of civil defense. Indeed, the Zeidler Administration saw evacuation as important and favored it over shelters. However, dispersion was of the utmost importance because it linked with Zeidler's greater urban planning goals and took into account demographic shift. Historian John M. McCarthy chronicles the link between urban planning and civil defense in his *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960*. This section combines evidence provided by McCarthy with other documents not cited in his work.

¹⁸³ Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 338.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 336-340.

¹⁸⁶ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 49.

McCarthy's research maintains that long before Frank Zeidler ever took office, influence from the Progressive Era sought to reform Milwaukee to a particular Progressive vision. Many large American cities such as Milwaukee were densely populated and overcrowded. Some Progressives sought to add aesthetic beauty to their cities in rectification of overcrowding. However, those in Milwaukee sought to plan the city by expanding outward as a means of removing congestion. Many individuals saw high population density and the resulting congestion as a societal ill.¹⁸⁷

City leaders who strongly supported planned decentralization included names familiar to many Milwaukeeans today such as Socialists Charles Whitnall and Mayor Daniel Hoan. The former now has a park and a high school in his name in southwest Milwaukee County while the latter's name adorns the large bridge in downtown Milwaukee running parallel to Lake Michigan.¹⁸⁸

The influence of leaders such as Whitnall and Hoan persisted in Milwaukee in the wake of World War II. Complementary to their vision was the sociological 'white flight' movement. This phenomenon of the latter half of the twentieth century is fairly well known, but what McCarthy points out in his book is the notion that unlike other cities, Milwaukee's Mayor Zeidler actively embraced this concept due to the influence of Whitnall and Hoan and sought to control it through regulated territorial annexation.¹⁸⁹

As Cold War tensions rose, the threat of nuclear weapons on American cities grew more apparent. Due to the danger posed to the heart of American cities, dispersion received active promotion from the federal government through such measures as the 1954 Housing Act. If cities spread out, they would be less viable targets. Indeed, Milwaukee's city planner once

¹⁸⁷ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 1-6, 114-115, 137.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 136-137,

remarked, “There will always be cities because of their obvious economic, social, cultural, and educational advantages...but our compact, congested cities of today no longer offer protection”¹⁹⁰ so city leaders had to “protect the city by scattering it.”¹⁹¹ The notion of city decentralization to counter the nuclear age found little support in cities like New York but was perfectly acceptable to leaders in Milwaukee. This planned urban sprawl for civil defense, McCarthy argues (and this author supports), did not conflict at all with the visions of Mayor Zeidler and other Milwaukee leaders.¹⁹²

Examining documents available to the public, the consolidation between urban planning and civil defense is quite evident. On September 24, 1949, the day after President Truman announced the news of the Soviets’ first atomic detonation, Mayor Zeidler had attempted to reassure his city. At the same time he quietly promoted his urban planning objectives under the guise of civil defense. Zeidler did this by telling the *Milwaukee Journal*, “The job of planners is to find the proper density of population that will permit industrial efficiency without crowding people too close together. City planners, especially in connection with the annexation program, have considered this.”¹⁹³ Indeed, planners had considered it.

The attention is evident in the 1951 copy of the Milwaukee Plan. The document cited a working relationship between the city’s civil defense planners, the Planning Division of the Land Commission, and the Housing Authority. It went on to cite a July 18, 1949 letter from the Executive Secretary of the Land Commission to the mayor. The secretary wanted to combine civil defense and urban planning through zoning policies. This would result in a policy of outward rather than upward expansion. Likewise, it also included annexation, development of

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 140-144.

¹⁹³ *Milwaukee Journal*, “Mayor Calm About A-Bomb, Urges Careful Thought”, September 24, 1949.

northwestern Milwaukee County, the use of parks in the county, and the construction of a civic center.¹⁹⁴

Once can see how dispersion and the expansionist urban planning goals of the Zeidler Administration were two sides of the same coin. The most blatant expression of this came from an official who wrote to the mayor, “We ought to spread out anyhow, H-bomb or no H-Bomb.”¹⁹⁵ Communities in the vicinity of the city were not oblivious to this, charging the city with “exploiting the current war crisis for its own ends.”¹⁹⁶ It is hard to argue the city of Milwaukee was not acting for its own self-interest, but that is the inherent nature of political entities. With the dual threats of demographic shift and nuclear war, the city had to act to preserve itself.¹⁹⁷

Expansion for the sake of dispersing as a defensive strategy and for the sake of growing larger drastically increased the city of Milwaukee’s borders. The city’s rate of annexation was an average of 1,338 acres per year between 1948 and 1956. The greatest territorial acquisition was in 1956 when the city acquired 2,926 acres. The suburbs and surrounding communities did not permit the city to acquire so much land without a fight and eventually formed an “iron ring”¹⁹⁸ around the city, trapping it. Though eventually blocked, Milwaukee made significant gains using civil defense as a means of justification for its new boundaries.¹⁹⁹

ii. Highway and Infrastructure

New boundaries were not Milwaukee’s only byproduct of civil defense. The city’s road and highway structures, regarded by some as the grandest public works in the history of

¹⁹⁴ Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee, “The Milwaukee Plan: An Organization Manual,” 18.

¹⁹⁵ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 154.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁹⁷ Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 338-339.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 339-342.

Milwaukee County, were other partial byproducts of civil defense. The freeway in itself was necessary due to the rise of the automobile. Cars were congesting old nineteenth century roads designed for use by trollies and horse-drawn carts. However, with the emerging threat of a third world war, the highways would serve another purpose in aiding with the city's potential evacuation.²⁰⁰

It certainly is true that city residents strongly desired an expressway for its own sake and were willing to pay for it.²⁰¹ While improving the transportation network was the primary goal, planners also considered defense and evacuation needs.²⁰² In one letter describing the NSRB "United States Civil Defense" report, Zeidler affirmed the concept of "establishing 'defense' arterial highways through cities."²⁰³ Milwaukee began funding its own highway development in 1950. This was ahead of the first receipt of state and federal aid in 1952²⁰⁴ and before the establishment of the interstate highway system via the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. Undoubtedly, through civil defense initiatives the city's highway system benefitted from additional tax dollars and a greater sense of urgency.²⁰⁵

D. Bureaucracy

The most direct and lasting legacy of civil defense are the current emergency management bureaucracies. Like the transition at the federal level from the FCDA to FEMA, Wisconsin and both the county and city of Milwaukee faced a similar conversion. Though civil defense evolved differently at the state and local levels, it still has left a lasting legacy as a direct

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 331-332.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Ammann and Whitney, Consulting Engineers, "Preliminary Plan for a Comprehensive Expressway System for the City of Milwaukee," (New York: Ammann and Whitney, 1952) 13.

²⁰³ Frank P. Zeidler to Richard Graves. Box 54, Folder 9. Official and Personal Papers of Carl and Frank Zeidler, 1918-1981. City Archives, Central Library, Milwaukee, WI.

²⁰⁴ Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, "Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report: 1954," (Milwaukee: The Commission, 1954) 10.

²⁰⁵ Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 332.

Current zones. Courtesy of the Milwaukee County Office of the Sherriff. (See “Contact” listing in bibliography)



continuation. The state now handles emergencies through the Division of Emergency Management under the Department of Military Affairs²⁰⁶ while Milwaukee County has the Division of Emergency Management subordinate to the Milwaukee County Sherriff’s Office.²⁰⁷ The city of Milwaukee now has the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.²⁰⁸

These changes began to occur in the 1960s. As civil defense grew irrelevant nationwide, the Wisconsin state legislature began to change civil defense law by moving it around the state statutes. Civil defense kept its name through the duration of the Cold War but moved from Chapter 21 to Chapter 22 in 1959. In 1967

the legislature changed the name of the chapter containing civil defense to “Department of Local Affairs and Development.” Once more in 1979, the state government moved civil defense into Chapter 166. Finally, coinciding with the end of the Cold War and the transition into emergency management, civil defense’s name in the state statutes became “Emergency Government.”

Presently those same laws exist in the books as “Emergency Management” in Chapter 323.²⁰⁹

Examining the current law in comparison with the original Chapter 21 civil defense, the two

²⁰⁶ Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs, Division of Emergency Management, “Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs, Division of Emergency Management,” <<http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov/>> (accessed April 13, 2012).

²⁰⁷ Milwaukee County Office of the Sheriff, “Contact: Emergency Management,” <<http://county.milwaukee.gov/Contact15640.htm>> (accessed April 13, 2012).

²⁰⁸ Milwaukee, city of, “Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security,” <<http://city.milwaukee.gov/OfficeofHomelandSecurity>> (accessed May 14, 2012).

²⁰⁹ Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, e-mail message to author, April 17, 2012.

documents bear similarity. However, the modern statutes are more inclusive with natural and other manmade disasters other than nuclear war.²¹⁰

Through all the legal modifications at the state level, the center of emergency preparedness remains at the county level. An example is the Milwaukee County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). Roughly coinciding with state legislation modifying civil defense, the county formed it in 1988. This organization has the designation of primarily preparing off-site emergency response plans for county officials in the event of a hazardous materials emergency. It also provides oversight over emergency preparedness activities for hazardous chemicals. Another duty is to catalogue reports pertaining to the usage and possession of toxic chemicals. The LEPC consists of a number of different groups and interests including area officeholders, emergency responders, county emergency management officials, transportation and public works officials, the press, and community and environmental groups. All these officials help determine how Milwaukee County handles emergency management.²¹¹

Milwaukee County maintained its civil defense program throughout the Cold War, surviving documents from Zone A indicate such,²¹² but like other governmental entities, it did eventually change. The old Milwaukee County Division of Emergency Government, at least in name, did not fully transition toward emergency management until 1998. Until then it had been a subdivision of the county executive's office before the county changed it to the Bureau of Emergency Management under the Milwaukee County sheriff's office. It has now become a division within the Administration Bureau of the sheriff's office and coordinates the emergency

²¹⁰ Wisconsin Statutes, "Emergency Management," <<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/323.pdf>> (accessed April 1, 2012).

²¹¹ Milwaukee County Office of the Sherriff, "Incidents/Disasters," <<http://county.milwaukee.gov/IncidentsDisasters15644.htm>> (accessed April 13, 2012).

²¹² Zone A Emergency Government, "Zone A Emergency Government Records, 1955-1990," Milwaukee Series 33, PH 6508, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI.

management programs of Milwaukee County's nineteen municipalities, all of which are fulltime.²¹³

Having nineteen independent municipal emergency management programs in Milwaukee County is unique compared with the rest of the state. Out of Wisconsin's 72 counties, Milwaukee County is unique for possessing a combination of fulltime municipal emergency response staff concurrent with all municipalities maintaining their own fulltime emergency management coordinators. Each municipality manages its own emergency preparedness, solely using the county for planning coordination. Since most of Wisconsin in terms of geography is rural, the locus of emergency preparedness, like civil defense, remains at the county level. Most local government units depend on the county to implement their local emergency management program.²¹⁴

Under this bureaucratic organization municipal and county governments coordinate with each other should the need for emergency assistance arise. Milwaukee County is part of the Southeast Wisconsin Mutual Aid Compact (SEWMAC) whose member governments agree to assist each other in terms of expertise, manpower, and materiel in emergency situations.²¹⁵ Likewise to SEWMAC, the city and county of Milwaukee along with the counties of Racine, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha – Most of the old Milwaukee Metropolitan Target Area – make up the Milwaukee Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) which similarly coordinates governments in handling emergency matters.²¹⁶ Milwaukee County itself maintains the old civil

²¹³ Stenbol, Carl, Milwaukee County Division of Emergency Management Administrator, 2012. Phone interview by author: Wisconsin. April 19.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Milwaukee, city of, "Urban Area Security Initiative," <<http://city.milwaukee.gov/OfficeofHomelandSecurity/UrbanAreaSecurityInitiativeUASI.htm>> (accessed May 14, 2012).

defense zone divisions as originally established in 1955 with slight modification, the city of Milwaukee now encompasses all of Zone B.²¹⁷

Within Milwaukee County, the city of Milwaukee remains active in emergency preparedness. Its own civil defense office closed in 1988²¹⁸ and has since become the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Like its counterparts at the municipal and county levels it too is dedicated to protecting Milwaukee from disasters and terrorism.²¹⁹

Since their inception in the 1950s, the bureaucracies have evolved significantly to address the changing times. They followed a similar transition to what occurred at the federal level. Not only do today's agencies bear much the same function as their old civil defense predecessors, but also seek to handle natural disasters and acts of terrorism. Today's government functions are the direct continuation of civil defense.

E. The Lasting Legacy

It may not be readily apparent, but civil defense has made an imprint on society in the Milwaukee area today. The concepts of urban planning and civil defense dispersion went hand in hand. Mayor Zeidler used it as a weapon to justify the efforts of his administration to annex as much territory for the city as possible. While city officials came into significant political and legal conflict with its neighbors, the city did roughly double its land area and prevent itself from becoming impotent. Likewise, civil defense helped justify the construction of Milwaukee's freeway system which today towers over the city, quite literally, as a significant public work. While the freeway may be visible, the most invisible and direct legacy of civil defense is the

²¹⁷ Milwaukee County Office of the Sheriff. "Contact: Emergency Management." <<http://county.milwaukee.gov/Contact15640.htm>> (accessed April 13, 2012).

²¹⁸ Stenbol, Carl, Milwaukee County Division of Emergency Management Administrator, 2012. Phone interview by author: Wisconsin. April 19.

²¹⁹ Milwaukee, city of, "Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security," <<http://city.milwaukee.gov/OfficeofHomelandSecurity>> (accessed May 14, 2012).

governmental bureaucracy. Like the development of FEMA, state and local agencies accordingly evolved. With the Cold War over and the threat of nuclear war decreased, emergency management agencies now contend with natural disasters and potential acts of terrorism. While unknown to many, civil defense has contributed to the Milwaukee known by its residents today.

Epilogue

In the present, Americans go about their day to day lives no longer hearing the words “duck and cover” except in jest. A few decades ago there *was* the danger of nuclear war. The world at large feared global nuclear holocaust. Life on Earth could have effectively ended in a series of brilliant mushroom clouds.

Today that fear has been replaced in the minds of some with terrorism. For others, the concern centers on the growing economic hardship faced by many Americans. The sense of anxiety nuclear weapons once had on the public consciousness has shifted to insecurity concerning hostile non-state actors. Many Americans are willing to go to war in foreign countries to prevent such terrorist attacks in the United States. The problems of today are different than those of yesterday.

Civil defense was the solution to a contemporary issue. Leaders in Washington had a Cold War to wage and municipal leaders like Frank Zeidler had cities to save. The Zeidler Administration’s Milwaukee Plan was an ambitious attempt to solve the unsolvable and rally Milwaukeeans, Wisconsinites, and Americans together to solve a common problem. The effectiveness of civil defense was indeed dubious, but some of the brightest individuals were attempting to address that issue.

It is difficult to argue against Frank Zeidler from being such an intelligent person. Interestingly enough, despite his intelligence, he lacked a formal education beyond high school. Zeidler had been a student at Marquette University in Milwaukee. But he ceased attending classes to have employment as a surveyor and topographical engineer during the Depression.²²⁰

As this paper has shown, Zeidler seized the initiative, became elected as a Socialist mayor, and made an impact. It was all to protect the Milwaukeeans around him and Americans

²²⁰ Andrade, Dean and James Reynolds, “Introduction,” *A Liberal in City Government*, v.

at large. The praise he received from Ralph Olson and John Fitzpatrick when they testified before Congress, for his contributions to civil defense, was neither the first nor the last time.²²¹

Yet, in spite of the valiant efforts he made in this field. The author does not believe civil defense would be what he would want to be remembered for. His mayoral memoir, *A Liberal in City Government*, written shortly after he left office in 1962, discusses civil defense sparingly. Perhaps one noteworthy passage is this one: “Shortly after [my first] inaugural address, the Milwaukee Civil Defense and Disaster Committee was created on my call. I devoted much time over the next 12 years to studying the problem of how urban life could be more safely organized in the age of nuclear weapons.”²²² Despite all evidence shown in this paper, Zeidler did not detail much more than that quotation in regard to civil defense. This is an immense display of modesty for what one may commonly expect out of a politician.

Using leaders such as Mayor Zeidler as an example, perhaps upcoming leaders can seize the initiative to solve one of the myriad of problems facing society today. Whether it is terrorism, poverty, war, or climate change, an individual and a city can make a difference. The legacies of civil defense in Milwaukee serve merely as one example.

²²¹ Olson, Ralph J., and John W. Fitzpatrick, “Civil Defense Activity Summary for the Military Operations Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations of the House of Representatives,” June 25, 1956: 2. Box 10, Folder “Reports: Report to Holifield Subcommittee, 1956.” Wisconsin Bureau of Civil Defense: Alphabetical Subject File, 1950-1966.

²²² Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government*, 50.

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