

## **Impacts of The Threat of Nuclear War in the Fifties**

(adapted from [http://www.tn4me.org/minor\\_cat.cfm/minor\\_id/23/major\\_id/10/era\\_id/8](http://www.tn4me.org/minor_cat.cfm/minor_id/23/major_id/10/era_id/8)):

The Cold War changed American culture in a number of important ways. Fear of communism greatly increased due to rising tensions with the Soviet Union.

Politicians of both parties often tapped into that fear and ran for office based on how strong they would be against communists. And fighting communism always involved the threat of nuclear war since both the U.S. and Soviet Union had nuclear weapons trained on each other.

President Dwight Eisenhower's military plan relied on nuclear stockpiles rather than land forces. He hoped the threat of nuclear destruction would restrain the Soviets.

Increasing American fears was the development of the hydrogen bomb, many times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had the weapons by 1953. People had feared attack by atomic bombs; a hydrogen bomb attack would be vastly more damaging.

Tennesseans were constantly reminded of their unstable circumstances. Science fiction and political movies, based on Cold War themes, were widely popular. Movie themes included attacks by giant insects (a byproduct of nuclear experimentation), invasions from outer space (mirroring the public fear of death from the sky), international espionage, and communist infiltration.

At school, children were taught to hide under their desks in the case of a nuclear attack. They even had practice drills.

Office buildings and schools were designated as Civil Defense fallout shelters. Nuclear warning sirens were erected in cities to warn the surrounding neighborhoods of impending attack. The sirens would be periodically tested.

Radio and television stations regularly interrupted their programming to run warning signals. The prerecorded announcement would say, "This has been a drill..." It is not surprising that Americans were fearful about a nuclear attack.

Nuclear fear led to a new market for fallout shelters. Home economics classes taught girls how to stock such a shelter with food and supplies in the event of nuclear attack. The government created official films on shelters, praising their value and advising homeowners on how to use them.

President Dwight Eisenhower recognized the negative effects of nuclear fear on Americans. He cautioned people that "We do not have to be hysterical. We can be vigilant."