

Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP)

**Infragard, Eugene, Oregon
Eugene Public Safety Center
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<http://www.uoregon.edu/~joe/infragard-2009/>

Notes: All opinions expressed in this talk are strictly those of the author.

I. Introduction

National Scale Threats, Including EMP

- “We need to plan for a class of **national scale disasters** that pose a significantly greater challenge than local or even regional disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. **Examples include nuclear EMP [Electromagnetic Pulse]** and national scale epidemics. Such national scale disasters deserve particular attention to preparedness and recovery since assistance from non-affected regions of the nation could be scarce or non-existent. A major problem with such disasters is maintaining communication and transportation line connectivity. Communities and regions become isolated making it difficult to maintain their survival.”

Proceedings of the 2006 Spring Research Symposium, Homeland Security: Engaging the Frontlines, Institute for Infrastructure and Information Assurance, James Madison University, in cooperation with the National Academies of Sciences Federal Facilities Council, IIIA Publication 07-02, “Emergent Themes” section, section 1, page 5 [emphasis added]

www.jmu.edu/iiia/webdocs/symposiums/2006%20Proceedings.pdf , pdf pg. 11

“What Is EMP?”

- We'll talk about electromagnetic pulse in more detail later in this talk, but just to give you the one page summary version now...
 - 1) Electromagnetic pulse effects are caused by the detonation of a nuclear weapon at high altitudes (40 km or higher)
 - 2) Electromagnetic pulse effects can damage electronic devices (such as computers) while also damaging the power grid
 - 3) A single EMP device at a high enough altitude could cause damage over a very wide area (e.g., the entire West Coast or even the entire United States), I kid you not.
 - 4) Electronics and electrical equipment can be protected against the effects of EMP with appropriate shielding and filtering
 - 5) Because the United States is heavily dependent on computers, computer networks, and the power grid, damage from EMP may be catastrophic.
 - 6) EMP-like effects might also occur naturally as the result of extreme sun spots and other severe space weather.

Authorities Have Been Trying To Warn Us About EMP-Related Risks Since at Least 1997

- "EMP does not distinguish between military and civilian systems. Unhardened systems, such as commercial power grids, telecommunications networks, and computing systems, remain vulnerable to widespread outages and upsets due to HEMP. While DoD hardens assets it deems vital, no comparable civil program exists. **Thus, the detonation of one or a few high-altitude nuclear weapons could result in devastating problems for the entire U.S. commercial infrastructure.**"

Statement of Dr. George W. Ullrich, Deputy Director, Defense Special Weapons Agency, *Threats Posed by Electromagnetic Pulse to U.S. Military Systems and Civilian Infrastructure*, July 16, 1997, House Military Research & Development Subcommittee [emphasis added]

http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/h970716u.htm

And Those Efforts Have Continued Over Time...

Congressman Roscoe Bartlett, 2004:

"On the same day [that] the 9/11 Commission Report asked our country to look in the rear view mirror to find out why America failed to prevent that terrorist attack, **Congress was warned that we are vulnerable and virtually unprotected against an EMP attack that could damage or destroy civilian and military critical electronic infrastructures, triggering catastrophic consequences that could cause the permanent collapse of our society.**

"The Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack reported on July 22, 2004 that “the current vulnerability of our critical infrastructures can both invite and reward an [EMP] attack if not corrected.

[continues on the next slide]

"A single unsophisticated nuclear missile detonated at high altitude could produce an EMP attack that damages or destroys electronic systems across the entire continental United States. Satellites in low earth orbit would also be damaged. Millions of Americans could die from starvation and disease as an indirect consequence of an EMP attack that disrupts the infrastructures for transportation, medical services, food and water. However, the most important finding of the EMP Commission is that this threat can be greatly mitigated at modest cost and in 3-5 years.

"Responding to the EMP Commission report, The Wall Street Journal editorialized on August 12, 'All we can say is, we hope someone in Washington is paying attention.'"
[emphasis added]

Letter from Congressman Roscoe G. Bartlett, Ph.D. (R-MD)
<http://www.house.gov/hensarling/rsc/doc/Bartlett--EMP.pdf>

Have We As a Nation Been Paying Attention To These Warnings?

- Unfortunately, no. The report of the Congressional Blue Ribbon EMP Commission* came out the same day as the Congressional 9/11 Commission report, so the findings of the EMP Commission appear to have largely gotten "lost in the noise."
- Four years later, while many key recommendations of the 9/11 Commission have been implemented,** the recommendations of the EMP Commission have largely been overlooked. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that most Americans don't know about EMP -- they don't know what EMP is, how EMP occurs, or how critical infrastructure can be protected from it.
- An April 2008 report from the Commission fared no better.***

* See www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/congress/2004_r/04-07-22emp.pdf

** <http://homeland.house.gov/SiteDocuments/20070727182653-51415.pdf> (URL wrapped due to length)

*** http://www.empcommission.org/docs/A2473-EMP_Commission-7MB.pdf

Why Hasn't The Government Worked to Harden Civilian Infrastructure Against The EMP Threat?

- Some people don't even believe that electromagnetic pulse is a "credible threat." For example, in 1997, during the Clinton era, General Robert T. Marsh, Retired, Chairman of the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection stated,

"I do not see any evidence that suggests capabilities seriously threatening our critical infrastructure. [...] There are many easier, less costly, and more dramatic ways for terrorists to use nuclear weapons than delivery to a high altitude. Such an event is so unlikely and difficult to achieve that I do not believe it warrants serious concern at this time. The administration's policy is to prevent proliferation and unauthorized access."

http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/has197010_1.htm

So If You Were A Rogue Nuclear State Or A Nuclear Terrorist, How Would You Use A Nuclear Weapon?

- If you had just one or two nuclear weapons and wanted to cause maximum damage to the United States, how would you use them? Would you...
 - use that weapon against Washington DC?
 - use that weapon against some other major city, such as NYC?
 - use that weapon against one of our enemies, in an attempt to kindle a “retaliatory” nuclear strike against the U.S. (even though the United States had no actual involvement in the staged attack?)

No, no and no.

You’d use that nuclear weapon to produce EMP effects.

Experts Confirm That Assertion

"If you had a few or perhaps only one or two nuclear weapons, you probably would want to use them in the fashion which imposes the largest damage expectancy on the United States and its military forces.

"If you are going to go after the military forces and you only have a few, by far and away the most effective way that you could potentially use it is an EMP laydown. If you were going against the American civilization itself, again, the largest damage you could expect to see by far is that associated with EMP laydown.

"As I said earlier, a large laydown over the lower 48 States has a damage expectancy which can be reckoned in trillions of dollars. Not 10 trillion, but well above a trillion dollars. So what you get the most bang for your nuclear buck out of, you get it out of most heavily damaging your adversary in either the military sense or the sense of civilian infrastructure. **EMP is the attack mode of choice.**"

Dr. Lowell Wood, LLNL, *Congressional Hearings on the Threat Posed by Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) to U.S. Military Systems and Civil Infrastructure*, July 16, 1997, www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/has197010_1.htm
[emphasis added]

Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) Report to the Defense Science Board (DSB) Task Force on Nuclear Weapon Effects Test, Evaluation, and Simulation, April 2005

A recent analysis of possible nuclear threat scenarios against U.S. interests by experts in the field revealed the extent that the landscape has changed since the Cold War ended. Whereas the Cold War demanded that we address massive use of large yield nuclear weapons by peer adversaries and survivability of retaliatory strategic assets, the current environment

emphasizes low yield terrorist or rogue nation use and survivability of infrastructure and mission capability. By analyzing a broad range of possible scenarios in terms of probability and consequence, experts concluded that the threats the U.S. should be most concerned with ranged from single, high-altitude use to terrorist devices in cities and conventional explosives at nuclear sites. The nuclear weapon effects community is fairly well equipped to predict high-altitude nuclear effects, but confidently predicting effects from terrorist use in cities and explosions against nuclear sites represents a new direction that must be addressed. However, in all areas, including the high-altitude effects area, U.S. capability is dwindling as experts age and retire without significant influx of new personnel.

Ten Likely, High Consequence Nuclear Threat Scenarios

- Thermonuclear 3rd party asymmetric – high alt
- Fission asymmetric against U.S. – high alt
- Fission 3rd party parity – high alt
- IND terrorist against U.S. - surface
- IND terrorist against 3rd party - surface
- RDD terrorist against U.S. - surface
- HE against nuc/rad terrorist against U.S. - surface
- HE against nuc/rad 3rd party parity - surface
- HE against nuc/rad 3rd party asymmetric - surface
- HE against nuc/rad terrorist against 3rd party - surface

Foreign Entities Are Also Clear

About Our EMP-Related Vulnerabilities

- *Peter V. Pry wrote:* Chinese military writings are replete with references to the dependency of United States military forces and civilian infrastructure upon sophisticated electronic systems, and to the potential vulnerability of those systems. For example, consider this quote from an official newspaper of the PLA: “Some people might think that things similar to the ‘Pearl Harbor Incident’ are unlikely to take place during the information age. Yet it could be regarded as the ‘Pearl Harbor Incident’ of the 21st century if a surprise attack is conducted against the enemy’s crucial information systems of command, control, and communications by such means as...***electromagnetic pulse weapons***....Even a superpower like the United States, which possesses nuclear missiles and powerful armed forces, cannot guarantee its immunity...In their own words, a highly computerized open society like the United States is extremely vulnerable to electronic attacks from all sides. This is because the U.S. economy, from banks to telephone systems and from power plants to iron and steel works, relies entirely on computer networks....When a country grows increasingly powerful economically and technologically...it will become increasingly dependent on modern information systems....The United States is more vulnerable to attacks than any other country in the world.” (Zhang Shouqi and Sun Xuegui, Jiefangjun Bao, 14 May 1996)

Dr. Peter V. Pry, EMP Commission Staff, before the US Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security, March 8, 2005; see

http://kyl.senate.gov/legis_center/subdocs/030805_pry.pdf at page 3. [emphasis added]¹³

Isn't There At Least Some Federal Agency Tasked With Explicit Responsibility for EMP Issues?

- The National Communications System, a branch of DHS which was formerly an office under the Department of Defense, is the focal point for EMP preparedness in as it relates to telecommunications. See Part 215, Title 47, Chapter II, Code of Federal Regulations, http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title47/47cfr215_main_02.tpl
- You can visit the National Communications System website at <http://www.ncs.gov/> EMP is **not** the focal point of that site. The most recent major EMP-related document I found there was NCS Directive 4-2, dated January 31st, 1992 and signed by Brent Scowcroft. Among other things, it defines telecommunications as excluding power transmission systems, and directs that "The NCS will support development of appropriate protection from EMP effects on telecommunication facilities."

Unfortunately NCS Appear To Be Primarily Concerned With Telephones, Not the Internet, and They May Be Rather Overly Optimistic

- "We have tested thoroughly our current generation of core telecommunication switches and have determined that there is minimal lasting EMP effect on these switches. Furthermore, most of our core communications assets are in large, very well constructed facilities which provide a measure of shielding. This situation will evolve as we move to Next Generation Networks, NGN, but we are monitoring this network evolution by testing critical components of the NGN and leveraging DOD testing."

Dr. Peter M. Fonash, Acting Deputy Manager, NCS, March 8, 2005, "Terrorism and the EMP Threat to Homeland Security," Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security of the Committee on the Judiciary, available online at <http://www.terrorisminfo.mipt.org/pdf/s-hrg109-30.pdf> at pdf pp5 9.

Speaking of Civilian Telecom System Tests...

- "I am familiar with some of the civilian telecommunications tests, in particular a number five electronic switching system test that was done in the Aries simulator, which I did the preliminary design for in 1968. The cables that normally extend hundreds of miles into that system were represented by cables coiled up and placed under the mobile vans it was carried in. So, as we mentioned earlier, that is certainly not a good representation of the stress that the system would receive. I am not trying to say that this is the complete work that has been done, but it is indicative of the concerns that a review of the subject by your committee might find both informative for you and beneficial for the defense authorities."

William Graham, President and CEO, National Security Research,
[http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has280010.000/
has280010_0.HTM](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has280010.000/has280010_0.HTM) October 7th, 1999

What About EMP and Power Delivery?

- Because power transmission is explicitly excluded from NCS' EMP responsibilities, who in the federal government would logically have responsibility for insuring the security of that area? That would be DOE (see HSPD-7 at paragraph 18 (d), <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/hspd-7.html>).
- Specifically, the relevant office would be the Department of Energy's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability Infrastructure Security and Energy Restoration Programs, see http://www.oe.energy.gov/our_organization/iser.htm (other DOE activities, such as national lab resources, would obviously also be relevant to dealing with the EMP threat to civilian power infrastructure). Unfortunately, I see no evidence that protecting civilian power infrastructure from electromagnetic pulse is a public priority for that office. If I've missed it, my apologies, and if folks would let me know where I can find public info about federal EMP power hardening activities, that would be great.

II. Technical Aspects of EMP

How EMP Effects Are Generated

- Electromagnetic pulse (EMP) effects are typically caused by the detonation of a nuclear weapon at high altitude, typically burst altitudes of 40 to 400 kilometers.
- Prompt gamma rays from such an explosion travel outward and are captured in the uppermost atmosphere in what's known as a “deposition region.”
- Within the deposition region, those gamma rays interact with air molecules via multiple effects, with the largest number of highly energetic free electrons being produced via the Compton Effect.
- Those highly energetic free electrons, generated within an extremely short time and interacting with the earth's geomagnetic field, can result in voltages in excess of 50kV capable of upsetting or killing sensitive electrical and electronic gear over a wide area.

Chapter XI, Glasstone & Dolan, "Effects of Nuclear Weapons,"

<http://www.princeton.edu/~globsec/publications/effects/effects.shtml>

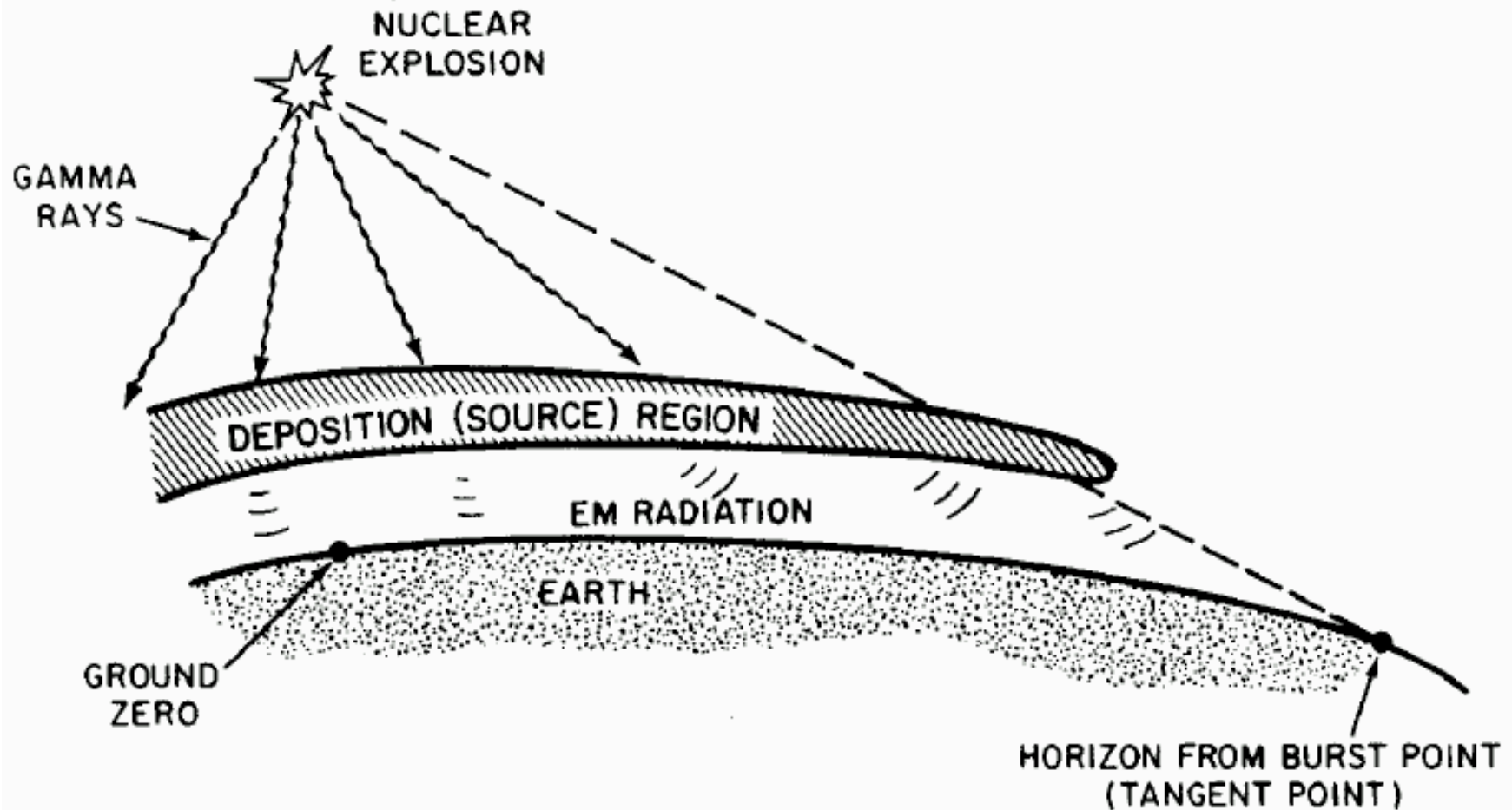


Figure 11.13. Schematic representation of the EMP in a high-altitude burst. (The extent of the deposition region varies with the altitude and the yield of the explosion.)

Source: <http://www.princeton.edu/~globsec/publications/effects/effects11.pdf>₂₀

EMP: A Line of Site Phenomena

- These effects all occur within **line of site** of the burst. To compute the extent of the effect, calculate the tangent radius as:

$$R(\text{tangent}) = R(\text{earth}) \cos^{-1} \left(R(\text{earth}) / (R(\text{earth}) + \text{HOB}) \right)$$

where $R(\text{earth})$ equals approximately 6371 km

Height of burst:

Approximate effects radius:

40 km	712 km
50 km	796 km
100 km	1,121 km
200 km	1,576 km
300 km	1,918 km
400 km	2,201 km*

* Note: assuming detonation occurred over Kansas, a 2,201 km radius would include virtually the entire continental U.S.

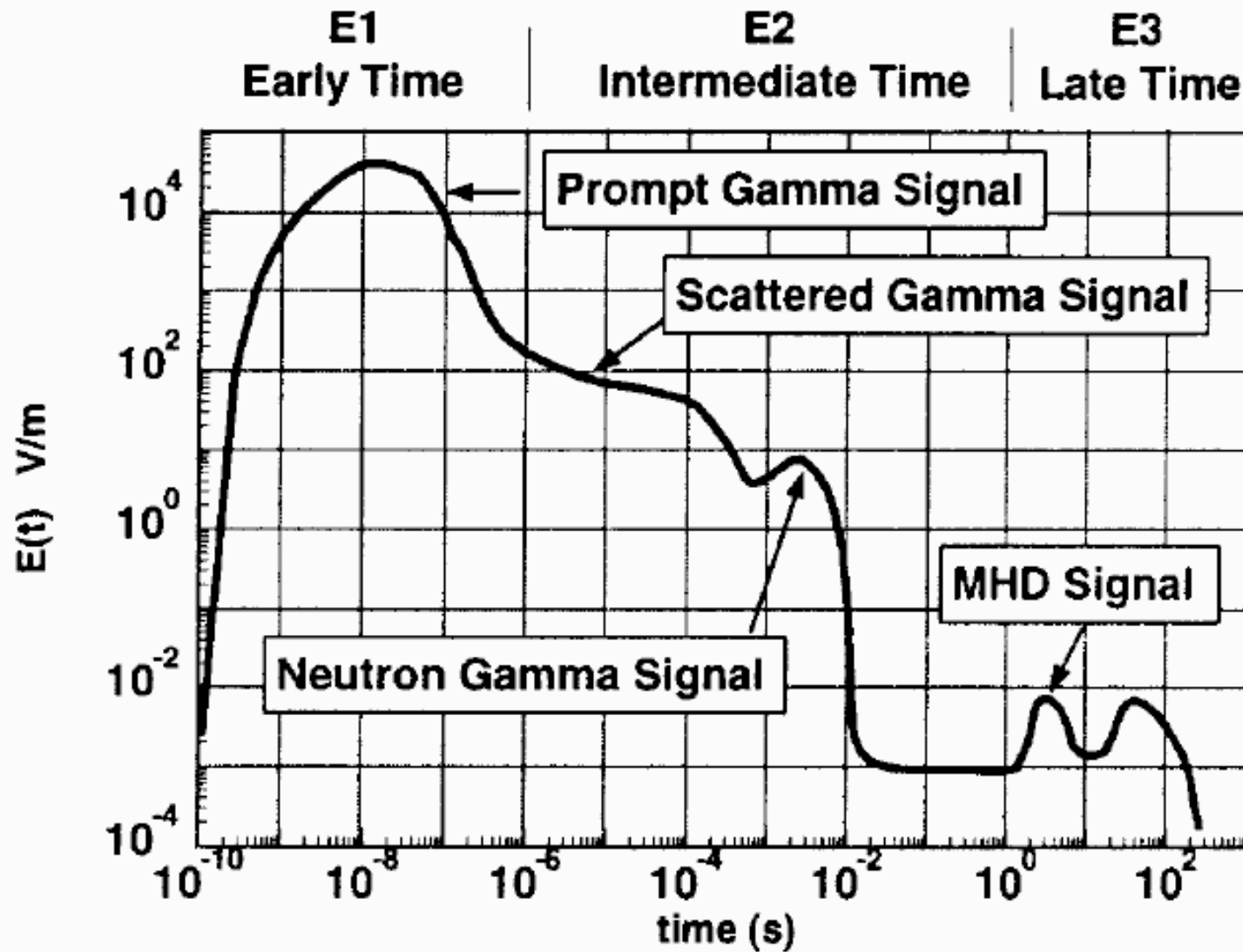


Figure 2. Illustrative EMP Effects – Fast Pulse

Source: Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack (burst height unspecified, but apparently on the order of 150km given the coverage extent shown)

A 50kV and Nanosecond Rise Time Threat

- MIL-STD-2169, a classified document, apparently provides detailed information about the EMP threat wave forms. For all of us (including me!) without access to classified documents like that one, an unclassified version of the EMP threat wave form has been released, and it describes a 50kV potential which develops in literally just nanoseconds.
- This is important because:
 - 50 kV is a very high voltage, more than enough to zap sensitive unprotected electronic devices
 - a few nanosecond rise time is so fast that most conventional surge suppressing technologies (aimed at much slower-building pulses, such as lightning), typically wouldn't have time to react
- It is also worth noting that besides the prompt ("E1") high voltage threat, there's also a longer duration wide area magneto-hydrodynamic ("E3") component which is also important.



Source: EMP Environment (MIL-STD-464, "Electromagnet Environmental Effects Requirements For Systems", <http://www.tscm.com/MIL-STD-464.pdf>).

Note log-log axes used on this graph.

MHD-EMP ("E3" or "Heave") Signal

- "MHD-EMP is the late time ($t > 0.1$ second) component of EMP caused by a high-altitude nuclear burst. [...] MHD-EMP fields have low amplitudes, large spatial extent, and very low frequency. Such fields can threaten very long landlines, including telephone cables and power lines, and submarine cables."

from "Engineering and Design - Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) and Tempest Protection for Facilities," DA EP 1110-3-2, 31 Dec 1990;
<http://www.fas.org/nuke/intro/nuke/emp/toc.htm> , Ch. 2, pdf pp. 5

[See also:

(1) "Nuclear Magnetohydrodynamic EMP, Solar Storms, and Substorms," <http://arxiv.org/ftp/physics/papers/0307/0307067.pdf>

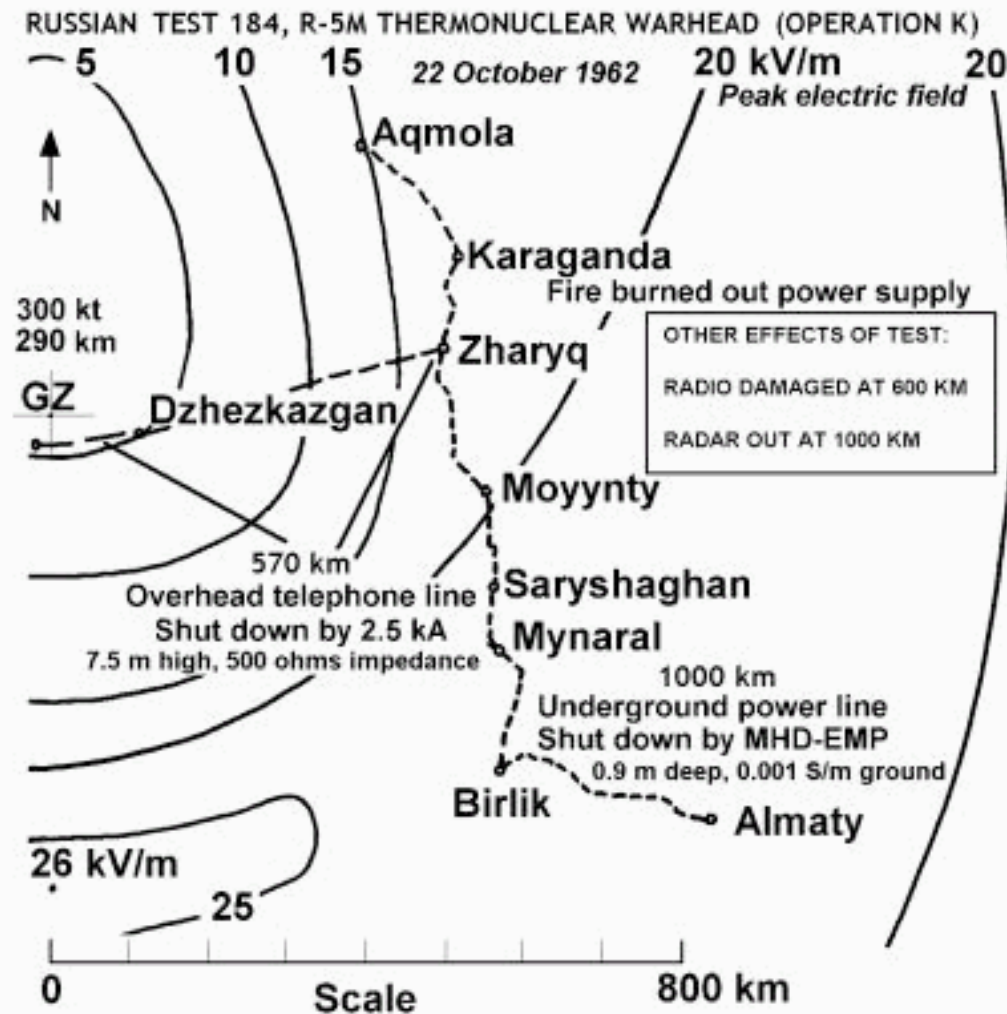
(2) "Solar Storm Threat Analysis,"

<http://personals.galaxyinternet.net/tunga/SSTA.pdf> and

(3) "EMP radiation from nuclear space bursts in 1962"

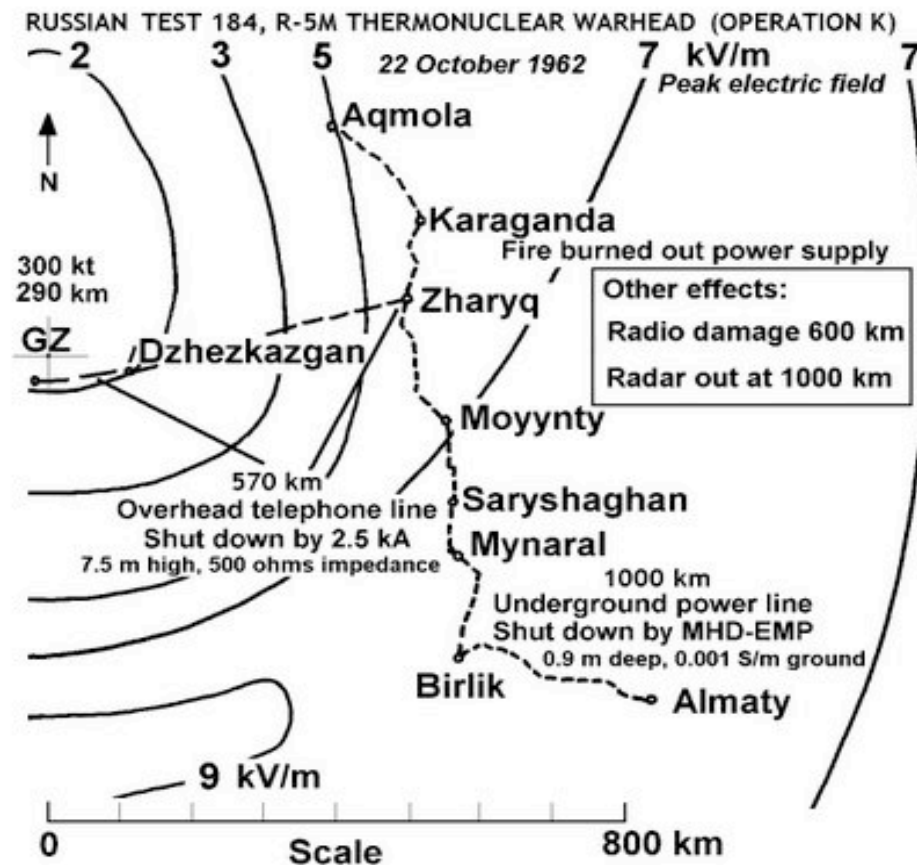
<http://glasstone.blogspot.com/2006/03/>

[emp-radiation-from-nuclear-space.html](http://glasstone.blogspot.com/2006/03/emp-radiation-from-nuclear-space.html) -- see also the next slide⁵]



Above: USSR Test '184' on 22 October 1962, 'Operation K' (ABM System A proof tests) 300-kt burst at 290-km altitude near **Dzhezkazgan**. Prompt gamma ray-produced EMP induced a current of 2,500 amps measured by spark gaps in a 570-km stretch of overhead telephone line to Zharyq, blowing all the protective fuses. The late-time MHD-EMP was of low enough frequency to enable it to penetrate the 90 cm into the ground, overloading a shallow buried lead and steel tape-protected 1,000-km long power cable between Aqmola and **Almaty**, firing circuit breakers and setting the **Karaganda** power plant on fire.

Oddly, While Rechecking That Page, I Noticed Some Changes To The Field Strength Values...



Above: USSR Test '184' on 22 October 1962, 'Operation K' (ABM System A proof tests) 300-kt burst at 290-km altitude near **Dzhezkazgan**. Prompt gamma ray-produced EMP induced a current of 2,500 amps measured by spark gaps in a 570-km stretch of overhead telephone line to Zharyq, blowing all the protective fuses. The late-time MHD-EMP was of low enough frequency to enable it to penetrate the 90 cm into the ground, overloading a shallow buried lead and steel tape-protected 1,000-km long power cable between Aqmola and **Almaty**, firing circuit breakers and setting the **Karaganda** power plant on fire.

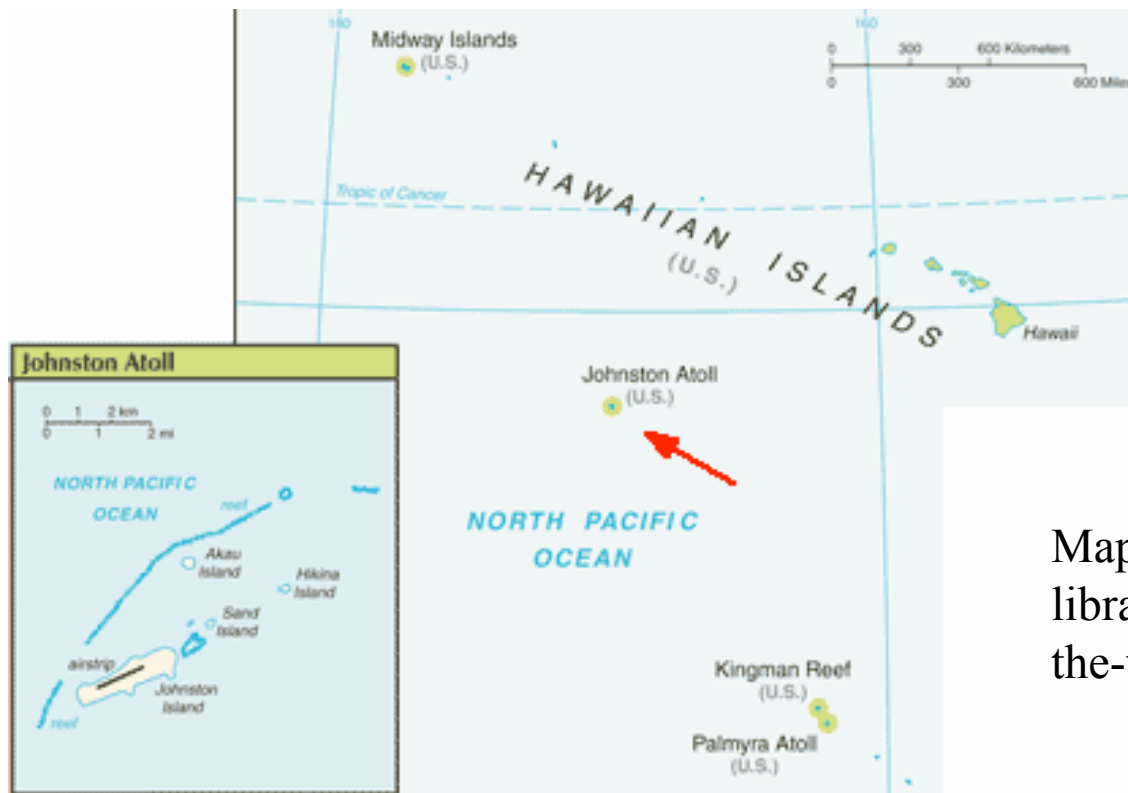
Some Other EMP Effects

We're Not Going to Consider...

- For the purposes of this talk, we're not going to consider other electromagnetic pulse-related effects, such as source region EMP and system generated EMP effects.
- Surface burst effects, such as source region EMP, are likely to be practically dominated by direct weapon effects such as thermal and shock wave damage, so we will not consider SREMP further in this talk.
- System generated EMP (SGEMP) effects require the affected system to be directly exposed to the impinging gamma and x-rays from a high altitude detonation, and thus would primarily apply to military systems and spacecraft aloft, components which are also beyond the scope of this talk.

So Where Does US Empirical Data About EMP Come From?

- Virtually all US empirical information about electromagnetic pulse comes from high altitude nuclear testing done 45 years ago in remote areas of the Pacific, such as the 1962 tests done near Johnston Atoll, over 700 miles southwest of Hawaii:



Map source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/um.html>

The Starfish Prime Shot, July 8th, 1962

- The most important of those nuclear tests was the Fishbowl Event series, part of Operation DOMINIC I. Those nuclear tests were done to evaluate the potential of high altitude nuclear explosions as a possible defense against incoming ballistic missiles, and weren't focused on EMP effects *per se*. The Starfish Prime shot of that series took place at 2300 Hawaiian time, July 8th, 1962, and consisted of a 1.45 MT warhead which was carried aloft to an altitude of 400 km by a Thor missile, 32km south of Johnston.
- “At zero time at Johnston, a white flash occurred, but as soon as one could remove his goggles, no intense light was present. [...] No sounds were heard at Johnston Island that could be definitely attributed to the detonation.”

See "A 'Quick Look' at the Technical Results of Starfish Prime. Sanitized Version," August 1962, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA955411>

Thor Missile; Starfish Prime Skyglow



Credits: Thor missile image courtesy Boeing. Starfish Prime sky glow image from AtomicArchive.com



Weapon Effects... a Long Ways Away

- In Hawaii, over 700 miles from Johnston Island, some resorts were reportedly holding "rainbow bomb" parties the night of the Starfish Prime shot, anticipating a spectacular auroral light show.*
- What was not expected was:
 - to have about 300 streetlights go out in Honolulu
 - to have burglar alarms go off
 - to have inter-island microwave communication links fail or
 - to have telephone systems fail.
- **The government promptly clamped a lid on these unexpected weapon effects**, and in fact, high altitude nuclear weapons effects info even has its own chapter in the declassification manual.**

* "Nuclear Explosions in Orbit," Scientific American, June 2004.

** Department of Energy "Historical Records Declassification Guide," CG-HR-1, Chapter 8, October 16, 1995.

Some Comments to Congress in 1997

- 'The first American high-altitude nuclear weaponry experiments after the Soviet breaking of the nuclear test moratorium of '58-'61 revealed a wealth of phenomenology of completely **unprecedented - and largely completely unanticipated -** character. Most fortunately, these tests took place over Johnston Island in the mid-Pacific rather than the Nevada Test Site, or "electromagnetic pulse" would still be indelibly imprinted in the minds of the citizenry of the western U.S., as well as in the history books. **As it was, significant damage was done to both civilian and military electrical systems throughout the Hawaiian Islands, over 800 miles away from ground zero. The origin and nature of this damage was successfully obscured at the time -** aided by its mysterious character and the essentially incredible truth." Testimony of Dr. Lowell Wood, http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/h970716w.htm

Some Aspects of Electromagnetic Pulse Effects Continue to Be Sensitive Today...



Classified colloquium to explore threat to U.S. from electromagnetic pulse attack

By Todd Hanson

December 12, 2005

The potential threat to the United States from an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack is the topic of a classified Director's Colloquium Wednesday by Laboratory weapons scientist Michael Bernardin.

Bernardin, of Thermonuclear Applications (X-2), will speak at 1:10 p.m., in the Administration Building Auditorium at Technical Area 3. Bernardin's talk is entitled, "Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack."

A recently completed congressional commission study assessing the nature of the high-altitude electromagnetic pulse (EMP) threat to the United States has found that EMP is one of a small number of threats that can hold our society at risk of catastrophic consequences. The commission found that EMP has the potential to damage electrical power systems, electronics and information systems upon which American society depends -- to the point where an attack could have irreversible effects on the country's ability to support its population, according to Bernardin. Furthermore, the commission concluded that an EMP attack might result in the defeat of U.S. military forces.

In his talk, Bernardin will review the nature of high-altitude EMP, the fields generated from various classes of nuclear weapons, and the effects that EMP can cause. He will then discuss the commission's findings and the assessed threat to the United States.

For the last 20 years, Bernardin has working in the Laboratory's Applied Physics (X) Division. During this time, he has focused on areas of nuclear weapon design, weapon outputs and effects, advanced weapon concepts and on enhancing scientific predictive capability for thermonuclear secondaries. In addition, he has worked for many years in modeling high-altitude electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and is a recognized national expert in the field.

In 1996, Bernardin co-founded, with Harold Rogers, the Theoretical Institute for Thermonuclear and Nuclear Studies (TITANS), a post-graduate institute at Los Alamos for teaching the physics of nuclear weapons to new staff. Currently, Bernardin is the acting group leader for X-2. In 2002, he was appointed to serve as the Laboratory's official representative to a congressionally-mandated EMP Commission. The commission met for two years and issued its Executive Report on July 22, 2004.

Bernardin's talk is limited to Q-cleared badgeholders with sigmas 1-10. The talk will be at a Secret-Restricted Data classification level and excludes foreign nationals.



Michael Bernardin [enlarge image](#)

Coming Back to the 1962 Tests, Those Tests Also Impacted Operational Satellites...

- The 1962 high altitude nuclear explosions pumped the Van Allen belts, creating persistent bands of radiation from the explosions. That radiation negatively affected satellite electronics, causing multiple satellites to prematurely fail:*
 - Satellite Ariel, launched April 26, 1962; died four days after Starfish Prime due to deterioration of solar cells.
 - Transit 4B: stopped transmitting 25 days after Starfish Prime.
 - Research Satellite Traac, in operation 190 days, ceased transmitting data 34 days after Starfish Prime.

* United States High-Altitude Test Experiences: A Review Emphasizing the Impact on the Environment, LA-6405, Issued October 1976,
<http://www.fas.org/sgp/othergov/doe/lanl/docs1/00322994.pdf>

An Aside: Satellites Remain Vulnerable to Lingering High Altitude Radiation Today

- "Perhaps the most devastating threat could come from a low-yield nuclear device, on the order of 50 kilotons, detonated a few hundred kilometers above the atmosphere. A nuclear detonation would increase ambient radiation to a level sufficient to severely damage nearby satellites and reduce the life time of satellites in low earth orbit from years to months or less. The lingering effects of radiation could make satellite operations futile for many months. Even nuclear detonations in the 10-kiloton range could have significant effects on satellites for many months [...]
To execute this mission, all that is needed is a rocket and a simple nuclear device. "

Report of the Commission to Assess United States National Security, Space Management and Organization, Donald Rumsfeld (e.g., future SECDEF), Chairman, Jan 11, 2001

<http://www.fas.org/spp/military/commission/report.htm>

III. EMP Shielding

Our Primary Focus Today Isn't On Satellites, It's On Managing Terrestrial EMP Effects

- Are current electrical and electronic devices at risk?
- How can they be protected?
- What have empirical nuclear EMP high altitude tests since Starfish Prime shown us?
- At least one of those questions, the last question, is an easy one to address – there haven't been further atmospheric high altitude nuclear tests since Starfish Prime.

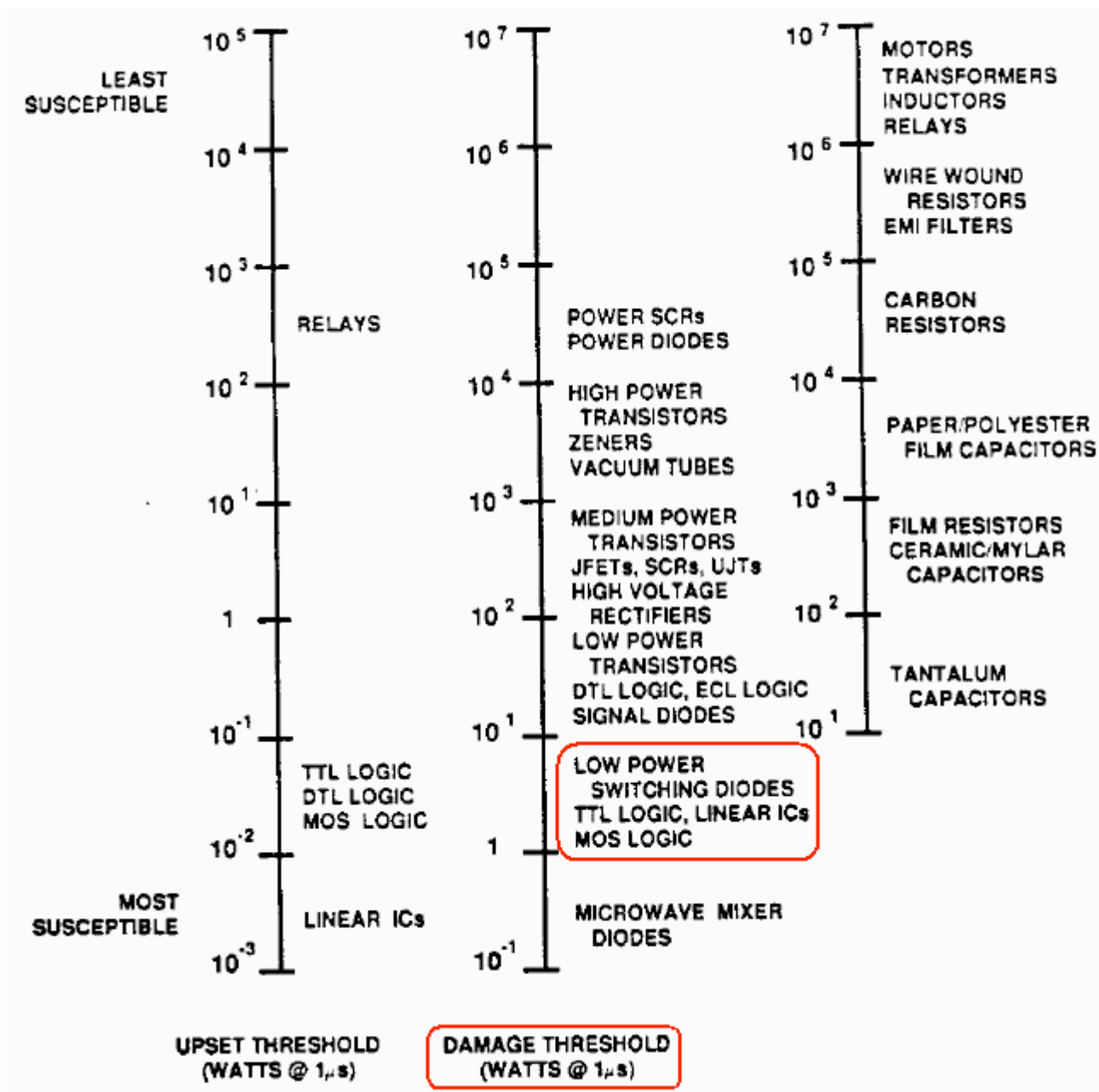
Why Haven't There Been Further High Altitude Atmospheric Nuclear Tests?

- In 1963, the Limited Test Ban Treaty* was signed, banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. Because of the LTBT, Starfish Prime gave us the “last best” *in situ* US experimental data available.
- An interesting topic for speculation over beers some time: what inspired the United States and Russia to consummate the LTBT? Was it the result of the Cuban Missile crisis (October 14th-28th, 1962)? Growing concern over domestic environmental effects of above ground nuclear contamination? Worries about loss of additional satellites to lingering radiation effects? Or was it recognition that EMP-related effects might just be too serious to explore further?

* <http://www.state.gov/t/ac/trt/4797.htm>

Electrical and Electronic Gear in 1962, and Electrical and Electronic Gear Now

- Ironically, the nation was in better shape, at least with respect to EMP-vulnerable electrical and electronic devices, in 1962 than it is now. Why? Well, in 1962 vacuum tubes were still common, and integrated circuits were virtually non existent. Now, that's reversed, and VLSI integrated circuits are very EMP sensitive.
- For a discussion of the types of electrical components which are most at risk of damage from electrical effects, see Department of the Air Force “Engineering Technical Letter (ETL) 91-2: High Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse (HEMP) Hardening in Facilities” available at http://www.wbdg.org/ccb/AF/AFETL/etl_91_2.pdf 4 March 1991.
- An excerpt from that report is shown on the following slide (boxes added by me for emphasis).



What's The Difference Between “Upset” and “Damage?”

- You may have noticed two different scales on the preceding chart – one for “upset” and one for “damage,” and you may wonder, “what's the difference?” I quote from EP 1110-3-2, available at: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/intro/nuke/emp/c-2body.pdf> at pdf pp. 17:

“Upset is a nonpermanent change in system operation that is self-correcting or reversible by automatic or manual means. Damage is an unacceptable permanent change in one or more system parts.”

- In the civilian world our focus is obviously primarily on damage, but in a military setting even having systems simply be temporarily upset can be catastrophic if that upset occurs during a critical time, such as while a plane is engaged in crucial flight operations.

Integrated Circuit Density Has Continued to Increase Since That 1991 Report...

- “[...] due to size and power reductions, modern electronics are inherently more vulnerable to some of the effects produced by a nuclear detonation. And each new generation, smaller and needing less power, exacerbates these vulnerabilities. Furthermore, as we make greater use of more affordable commercial parts and components, we potentially introduce new vulnerabilities into our military systems. Additionally, the military's increasing reliance on commercial space-based systems makes it more vulnerable to the nuclear weapon effects being discussed.”

Comments of Dr. George W. Ullrich, Deputy Director, Defense Special Weapons Agency

http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/h970716u.htm

Just In Case There's Still Any Doubt

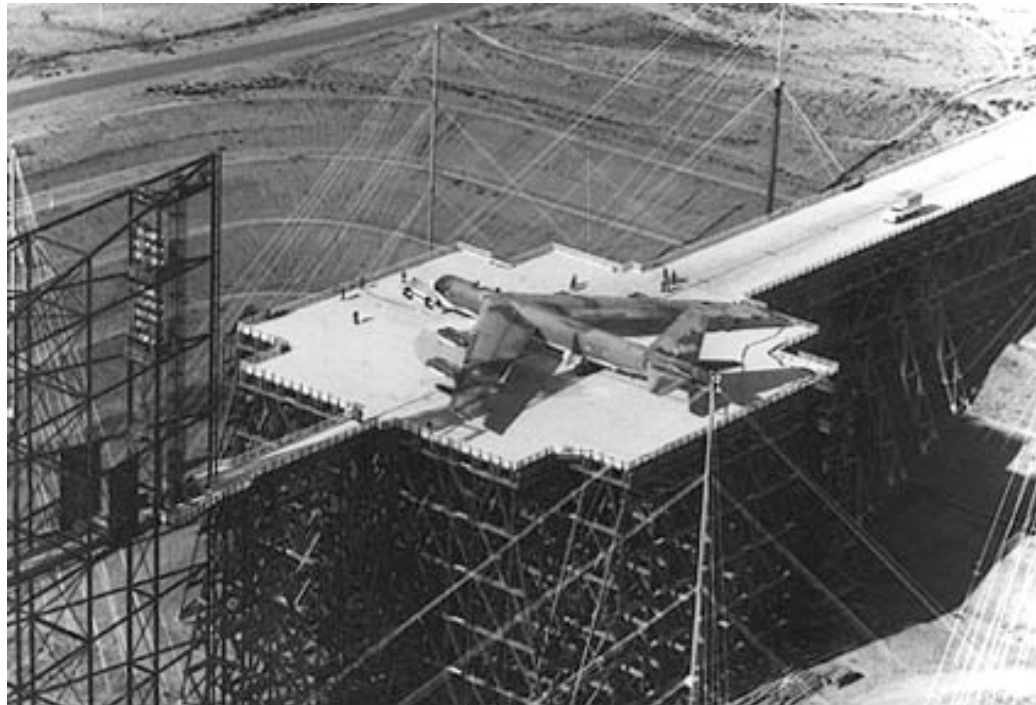
- “It is a reasonable projection that most, if not all, modern computer systems exposed to referenced EMP field levels—which are 50 kilovolts per meter, not just 10—but the very high levels you might see in most of the United States—most modern computer systems ranging from laptops to mainframes would wilt. By wilting, they would at least cease to function. In many cases, they would be burned out. So it would require very major maintenance before they could be restored to operation.

“Not just computers in aircraft but computers everywhere, other than in this type of very high integrity metallic enclosures that Dr. Ullrich sketched in his opening statement. Computers in any other enclosure than that type would be compromised, if not destroyed outright.”

Testimony of Dr. Lowell Wood, http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has197010.000/has197010_1.HTM

But If We Haven't Done High Altitude Atmospheric Testing Since 1962...

- ... how do we know what's vulnerable and what's not, or how to effectively protect critical systems? Answer: EMP simulators, such as the Trestle facility at Kirtland AFB in NM, the largest wood-and-glue lam structure in the world.



See also <http://www.ece.unm.edu/summa/notes/trestle.html>

Other EMP Simulation Facilities

- A list of electromagnetic pulse simulation facilities, at least as of 1994, can be found at pdf pp. 8 of <http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA278230&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>, “Test Operations Procedures (TOP), 1-2-612 Nuclear Environment Survivability,” 15 April 1994. See also http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has197010.000/has197010_1T.HTM
- As discussed in that Congressional hearing, it is believed that many EMP simulators have been mothballed or decommissioned, thereby limiting opportunities for empirical testing of equipment under simulated EMP signals (for example, the Trestle facility shown on the preceding page is no longer operational).
- My main interest, however, is the Internet. So have critical Internet components, such as core network routers, switches and optronics been hardened, and “proof tested” for EMP hardness?₄₆

There Is No Indication That Core Routers, Switches and Optronics Are EMP Hardened

- After reviewing a number of major vendors web sites for information about the EMP hardening status of routers and switches, and after visiting with a number of vendor staff members, I was unable to find any public indication that any major vendor's routers and switches are EMP hardened by default. (If you are a manufacturer of routing or switching gear, or optronics, and your gear **is** EMP hardened and that information can be publicly shared, please let me know.)

Thus, unless a vendor explicitly tells you otherwise, assume that ALL critical Internet core routers, switches, optronics and other key equipment will need supplemental EMP shielding or hardening.

Fiber Optic Cable Maybe Immune to EMP, But OEO Equipment Probably Isn't...

- When thinking about critical network equipment, PLEASE don't forget about electronics deployed in support of optical networks.
- While fiber is largely EMP resistant (modulo a reference or two I've seen associated with potential "fiber fogging"), the optical-electrical-optical ("OEO") retime/reshape/reamplify ("3R") optronics probably aren't EMP resistant (again, unless a vendor tells you explicitly to the contrary).
- **Just as you should provide supplementary shielding for critical routers and switches, you should ALSO plan to provide supplemental external EMP shielding for any optronic devices you may have deployed.**

What's Involved in Hardening or Providing External EMP Shielding For Critical Gear?

- The goal is to isolate key equipment from potentially dangerous RF energy by providing a continuous metal shield (such as 10 gauge/3.416 mm or better steel) around vulnerable equipment.
- A very conservative hardening target is 100dB worth of attenuation from 1kHz to 10GHz, with no waveguide beyond cutoff (WBC) penetration (discussed later) larger than 1.0 cm; see, for example "Guide Specifications for HEMP/TEMPEST Shield Doors, Electrical Filter/ESA Assemblies, and Other Shield Penetrations," Rev 1, Jun 1988, at pdf page 120, available online at <http://www.custompowersystem.com/images/hemp.pdf>
- A less stringent protection EMP hardening target would be 50db from 14kHz to 1GHz, with no WBC penetration larger than 10.0cm

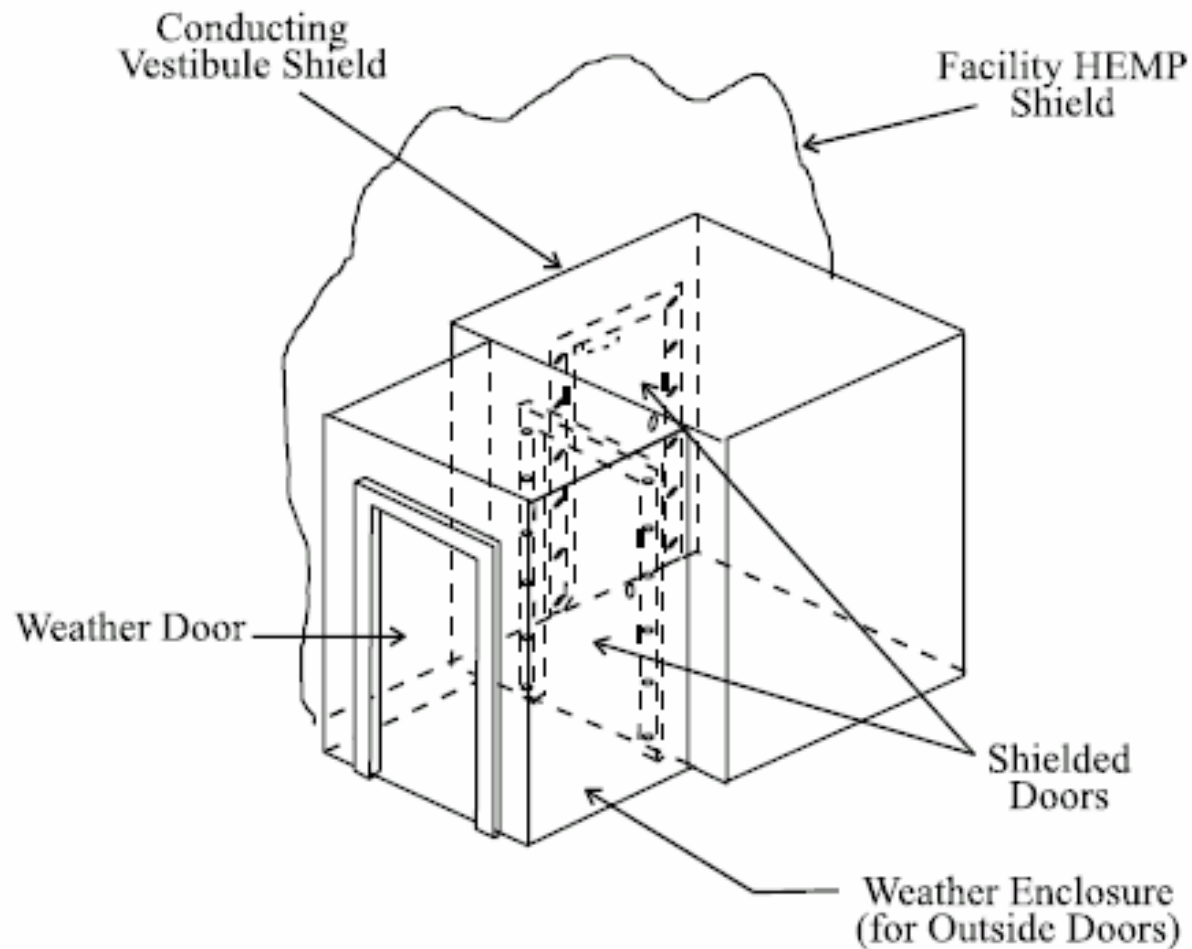
Providing EMP Shielding For Systems...

- Much of the effort (and cost!) involved in constructing EMP shielded areas is associated with the careful design, essentially perfect craftsmanship, and extensive conformance testing that's required to verify required protection.
- EMP shielded areas also require extra space, which may be an issue for some space-constrained facilities. Ideally there should be at least 3 feet of access space around the shielded area for ongoing EMP testing and for maintenance access to penetrations
- If you're out of space before you even start, now might be a good time to think about a secondary data center, connected by fiber...

Doors and EMP Enclosures

- Doors are one of the most difficult areas when it comes to providing unimpaired EMP shielding.
- Doors for personnel and equipment access will often be specially constructed to use a double knife edge seal with beryllium copper fingerstock contacts.
- Ideally doors will be configured in pairs, arranged at right angles, separated by a vestibule, and protected from being opened simultaneously by an interlock mechanism (see the illustration on the next slide)

Sample Double Door EMP Vestibule Style Entrance



Sample Modular Steel EMP Enclosure



Photo courtesy ETS-Lindgren.

Sample Welded Steel EMP Enclosure



Photo courtesy ETS-Lindgren.

You May Also Just Want to Shield Gear From EMP On A Rack-by-Rack Basis

- Looking at those previous EMP shielded areas, one might get the impression that they represent the smallest areas which can be EMP shielded. That would be incorrect. You can also purchase EMP hardened enclosures built around 19" telco racks.
- Those enclosures can even be embedded within a GSA approved security container (aka a safe) if physical security of equipment is also a concern (hey, you lock your guns up in a gun safe when you're not using them, right? so why not protect a couple hundred hundred thousand dollar router at least equally well?)

Sample EMP Shielded 19" Rack Enclosure

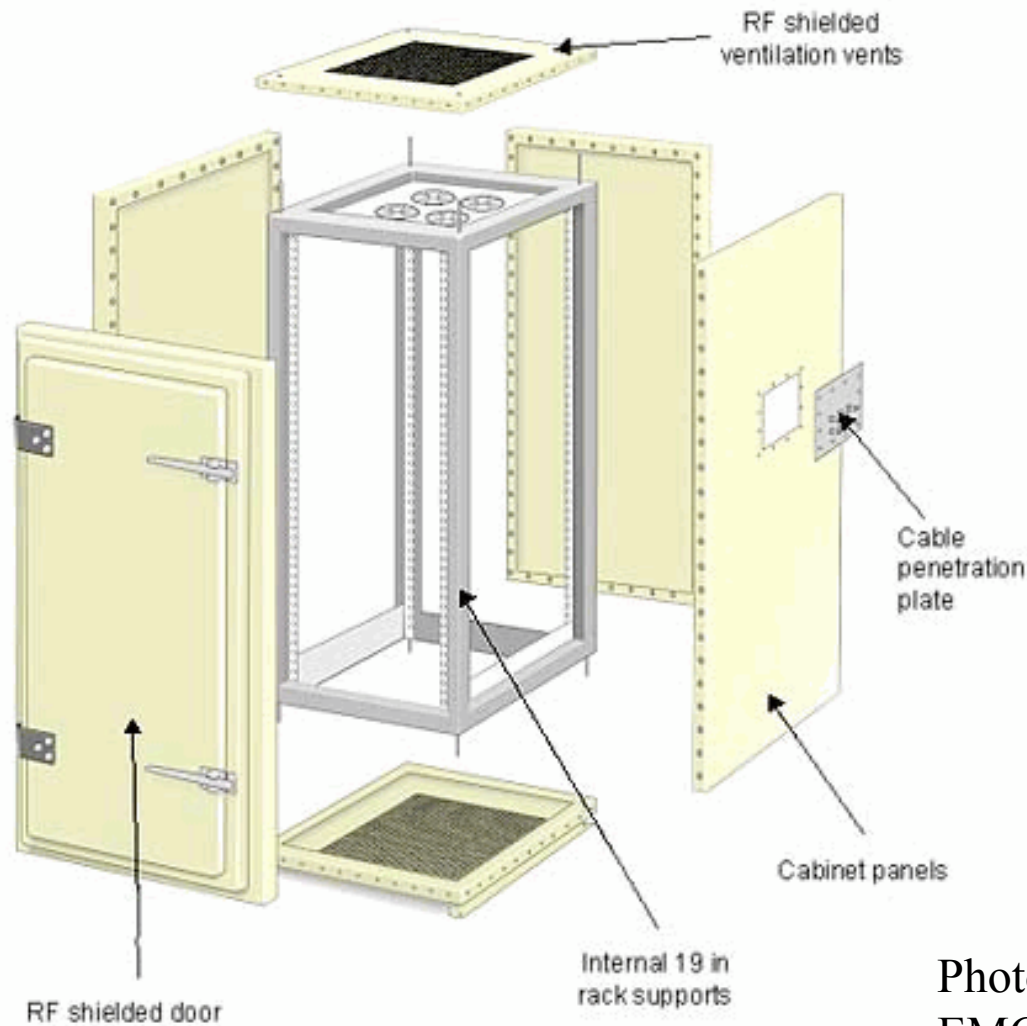


Photo courtesy of European
EMC Products Limited 56

Sample TEMPEST (and GSA Class 5 Security Container) Enclosure



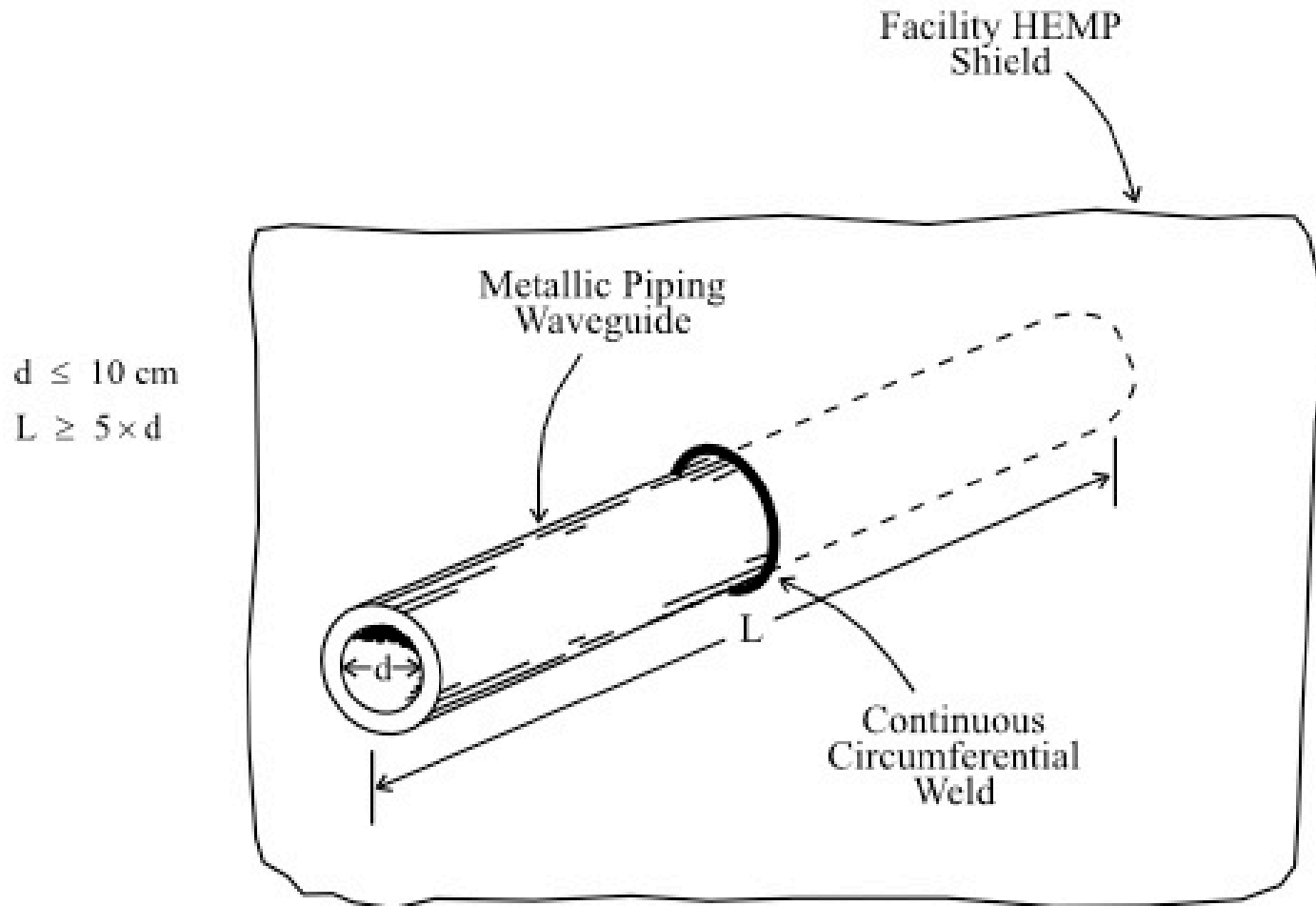
Photo courtesy ETS-Lindgren.

Waveguide Beyond Cutoff Penetrations

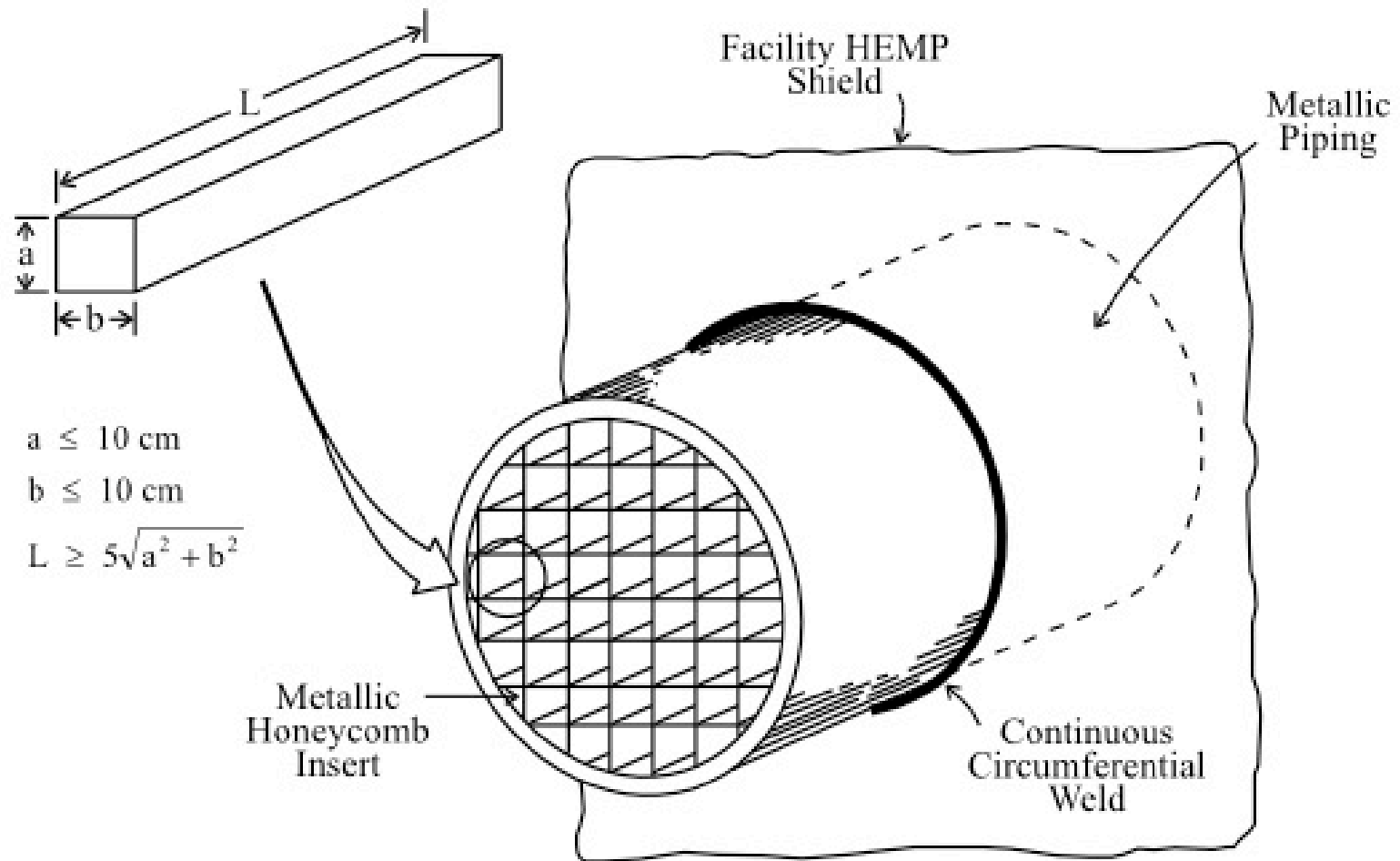
- Shielded enclosures can't be sealed as tightly as a can of soup. :-)
Among other things, there needs to be some way to safely pass fiber optic data cables through the shielding of the enclosure, and some way to provide air for personnel as well as ventilation to keep gear from overheating.
- The way this normally gets handled is via "waveguide beyond cutoff" (WBC) penetrations.
- The maximum diameter of the allowed WBC aperture varies with the target cutoff frequency, but a diameter no larger than 10cm is specified by MIL-STD-188-125-1 for protection through 1GHz, with a length that's at least 5 times that diameter. The waveguide must be made of metal, continuously circumferentially welded to the facility EMP shield, and there must be no conductors present within the waveguide. See the illustrations on the following slides from MIL-STD-188-125-1

Waveguide Beyond Cutoff (cont.)

MIL-STD-188-125-1



Honeycomb WBC for Larger Penetrations



EMP Shielded Facilities and Electrical Feeds

- Power for equipment located within the EMP shielded enclosure must be provided via specially filtered lines (e.g., normal surge suppressors don't react fast enough to protect critical equipment against EMP). For some examples of EMP electrically protective filters, see:
 - <http://www.ets-lindgren.com/pdf/N2556.pdf>
 - http://www.ramayes.com/EMI_RFI_Filters.htm
 - <http://www.custompowersystem.com/Efilters/products4.htm>
- All EMP shielded enclosures must also be carefully electrically bonded and grounded.

Spares and Recovery

- Review stockpiles of spare parts, including fuses, replacement power supplies, spare fans and hard drives, etc. – do so NOW while you can easily order additional spares which might prove useful. Too many products to easily stock spares? Maybe it is time to think about standardizing and consolidating on a smaller number of unique devices!
- When it comes to equipment which has been damaged beyond what you can repair yourself, recognize that the primary source of replacement gear may be out-of-region or from overseas, and that in some cases replacement gear may be effectively unobtainable in any relevant time frame. For that reason, consider stockpiling replacement gear (or even just recently replaced equipment!) in an EMP-secure warehouse for use as replacement gear in the event current shielded gear somehow gets damaged by an EMP strike.

But, Beware The "Single-Event Fallacy"

- "Avoid the single-event fallacy. In assessments of potential tactical situations, don't assume that EMP will occur once and then be over. The contrary may be the case. An aggressor may initiate a precursor attack with high altitude EMP to initially damage unprotected equipment, and then follow-up with additional high altitude or surface-burst explosions to exploit the tactical situation." (see FM 3-3-1, http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/army/fm/3-3-1_2/Appc.htm)
- Thus, if you try to "hedge your bets" by not hardening systems in place, but simply caching replacement gear which you can drag out and installed if needed, recognize that your replacement gear might very well end up getting killed by a follow on attack just as your original gear was. Hardening is the only real answer...

IV. But Is There Really Even A Threat?

EMP Shielding Isn't Cheap to Build Out

- I'll freely concede that hardening critical equipment in your facility with EMP shielding isn't cheap, either to install or to maintain.
- You don't want to embark on an expensive program of EMP hardening your facilities if you aren't pretty **dang sure** that there's a real threat out there...
- I encourage you to make up your own mind – this might all be nothing to worry about, and you can just ignore this whole talk.
- On the other hand, here are some additional bits of data to chew on while you sit there happily un-EMP-shielded.

Components of a Credible EMP Threat

- For there to be a credible EMP threat, you need five things:
 - 1) a means to get to the required altitude, such as a missile
 - 2) a suitable target,
 - 3) a motive for conducting an EMP attack,
 - 4) the absence of a deterrent, and
 - 5) a nuclear weapon for the missile to deliver.

1) Missiles

- The type of missile required to get a nuclear least 40 km above the earth need not be particularly advanced. I quote:

"The Scud rockets used by the Iraqis [...] flew to altitudes of 150 kilometers, which is imminently satisfactory for the type of regional EMP laydowns I have been referring to. [...] Scud-type rockets exist in copy to the extent of over 15,000 Scud class rockets owned by over 30 nations in the world at the present time. So getting to the threshold of space and carrying a nuclear explosive there is something that, unfortunately, is a regrettably potentially widespread – maybe actually widespread capability."

Statement of Dr. Lowell Wood,

http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/h970716w.htm

What Does the Congressional Research Service Think?

"About three dozen countries have been publicly identified as having ballistic missiles, and half of those countries are in Asia and the Middle East. About 30 of these countries have, or are developing, ballistic missiles that can deliver a 500- kilogram warhead 300 kilometers or further. Of the non-European countries, fourteen have produced ballistic missiles (Argentina, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, South Korea, Syria, Taiwan, Ukraine, and South Africa which no longer produces missiles). In addition to these regional powers, which are often discussed as missile proliferators, several Western and Eastern European countries and republics of the former Soviet Union have missiles." [emphasis added]

"Missile Survey: Ballistic and Cruise Missiles of Foreign Countries," Congressional Research Service Report RL30427, Updated March 5, 2004, pdf pages 7-8.

One Scenario Which Has Been Mentioned

- Quoting Peter V. Pye from March 2005:

"Iranian flight-tests of their Shahab-3 medium-range missile, that can reach Israel and U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, have in recent years involved several explosions at high altitude, reportedly triggered by a self-destruct mechanism on the missile. **The Western press has described these flight-tests as failures, because the missiles did not complete their ballistic trajectories. Iran has officially described all of these same tests as successful. The flight-tests would be successful, if Iran were practicing the execution of an EMP attack.**

"Iran, as noted earlier, has also successfully tested firing a missile from a vessel in the Caspian Sea. A nuclear missile concealed in the hold of a freighter would give Iran, or terrorists, the capability to perform an EMP attack against the United States homeland, without developing an ICBM, and with some prospect of remaining anonymous. Iran's Shahab-3 medium-range missile, mentioned earlier, is a mobile missile, and small enough to be transported in the hold of a freighter."

http://kyl.senate.gov/legis_center/subdocs/030805_pry.pdf [emphasis added]₉

SCUD-Class Missiles Even Appear to Have Been Available on the Open Market...

- **U.S. seizes Scud missile imported by weapons collector**

<http://www.cnn.com/US/9809/25/missile.seizure/> (Sept. 25, 1998)

LOS ANGELES (CNN) -- U.S. Custom officials are investigating how an operational Russian-designed Scud B missile was imported into California. [...] The missile has been identified as a Scud B SS-1C that was manufactured in Czechoslovakia in 1985. Officials are trying to determine whether the wealthy California weapons collector who they say imported the missile from London falsified customs documents and claimed the missile was "demilitarized." [...] the missile was fully operational because it has a guidance system and an engine. It did not, however, come with a warhead or fuel. [continues]

Or Could Even A High Altitude Balloon Reach EMP-Relevant Altitudes?

- <http://www.csbf.nasa.gov/balloons.html> says

"Standard NASA scientific balloons are constructed of polyethylene film; the same type material used for plastic bags. This material is only 0.002 centimeters (0.0008 inches) thick, about the same as an ordinary sandwich wrap. [...]

"These very large balloons can carry a payload weighing as much as 3,600 kilograms (8,000 pounds), about the weight of three small cars. They can fly up to 42 kilometers (26 miles) high and stay there for up to two weeks."

- So yes, a specialized high altitude scientific balloon could loft a warhead to EMP-effect relevant altitudes.

2) A Suitable Target

- Because of the nature of the EMP effect, electromagnetic pulse effects are not suitable for use against all conceivable targets.
- For example, because a minimum height of burst is needed to achieve EMP-related effects, and because even a 40 km height of burst will affect sites within a 700 km radius, an EMP weapon cannot be used if a target is too close to unhardened friendly assets. [One is reminded of the (unrelated) exhortation to "keep your friends close, and your enemies closer!"]
- EMP effects are not precise/surgical. Atmospheric effects and weapon related effects mean that EMP effects may vary from projections, or from shot to shot, and limited empirical test data means that EMP weapons cannot be treated like a precision guided munition. They are an area weapon, not a point weapon.
- EMP weapons are also obviously not appropriate if a target is pre-industrialized, or widely hardened against EMP.

Coastal vs Mid Continental Use

- Are there considerations which might lead an attacker to conduct a high altitude nuclear burst over one coast or the other rather than attempting to achieve full continental coverage with a high altitude high yield burst over the Great Plains?
- Maybe yes. Consider the following potential factors:
 - The attacker has a lift vehicle with limited altitude potential, or the attacker has a comparatively low yield weapon. Given those limitations, a mid-continent burst strategy wouldn't be assured of reaching high value areas on the coasts
 - The attacker might want to launch from offshore, in international waters; coastal targeting would also reduce flight time (and thus exposure to potential anti-missile defenses)
 - An attacker might want to impede military operations from one coast while being indifferent to those on the other coast
 - If only half the country has been hit, the attacker can still use threats of attacks against the other half as a potential deterrent?

Example of A Possible Coastal Use Scenario

- "Not a movie made for TV" (October 3rd, 2007)
<http://washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071003/COMMENTARY/110030040/1012&template=printart>

"James G. Zumwalt - An innocent-looking freighter sails 200 miles off the East Coast of the United States. In international waters, it appears to be no threat. However, its true intentions soon become evident. During the ship's transit over thousands of miles from a port in a country unfriendly to the United States, a SCUD missile remained concealed but is now being prepared for launch from the freighter's deck.

"The warhead of the soon-to-be fired SCUD — a relatively inexpensive missile abundant around the world — is not designed to detonate on American soil or to inflict massive civilian casualties via a chemical, biological or nuclear weapon. This warhead's targeted impact is purely economic, for it is armed with an EMP (Electromagnetic Pulse) payload — tailor-made to inflict as much such damage as possible. And, as a recent study concludes, **detonation over the Baltimore-Washington-Richmond corridor could result in economic output losses (exclusive of infrastructure replacement costs) exceeding \$770 billion or 7 percent of the nation's annual gross domestic product.**" [articles continues]

3) Motive For Conducting An EMP Attack

- Potential motives for conducting an EMP attack are as numerous as our potential enemies, including ideological/political/religious reasons, economic reasons, or military reasons.
- One could even imagine environmental motives -- perhaps we might face an attacker who thinks the US is consuming more than its share of world resources, or is irreversibly damaging the environment, etc. An EMP strike against the United States might be viewed by such a person as something which would cause a reversion to a utopian and somehow economically gentler pre-industrialized era (although it is unclear how that goal would be realized if the rest of the world remained industrialized). In that regard, it was rather eerie to hear Osama Bin Laden talking about things like "global warming resulting to a large degree from the emissions of the factories the major corporations," see http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2414656.ece₇₅

EMP Attacks Are A Type of Strategic "Cyber Warfare"

- Occasionally people will speculate on the topic of cyber warfare, usually congering up attacks involving distributed denial of service attacks, worms and other sorts of malware, targeted computer intrusions, etc. While all those sorts of cyber attacks are/might be part of the cyber warriors arsenal, they're all fundamentally conventional/tactical attacks of limited scope and scale, and all are subject to mitigation (if only by selective isolation of targeted systems from parts of the Internet which are attacking them).
- What would be the equivalent of a strategic nuclear attack in the context of cyber war? I assert that when it comes to a strategic attack in a cyberwar context, the ONLY true strategic attack that I can think of would be an EMP-based attack.
- For more on cyber war, see: "Cyber War, Cyber Terrorism and Cyber Espionage," www.uoregon.edu/~joe/cyberwar/cyberwar.pdf

4) Absence of A Deterrent

- Currently traditional nuclear attacks are deterred by:
 - pragmatic recognition that a nuclear attack will be met by a withering response in kind, and
 - world condemnation which would accompany any attack which resulted in widespread direct loss of life.
- Note that attacks employing EMP-related effects would perturb that equation:
 - They could potentially be conducted in a way which would make attribution, and thus retribution in kind, very difficult
 - EMP-based attacks may be launched by entities who are largely or completely immune to EMP attacks in return (either because of collateral damage considerations, or their society's pre-industrialized status)
 - An EMP laydown would not directly result in widespread loss of life (although deaths may be widespread as indirect effects)

5) Availability of A Nuclear Weapon

- I won't spend time speculating on terrorist access to nuclear weapons; let's just focus on the states known to have nuclear weapons available. There are nine of those: the U.S., Russia, the U.K., France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea (South Africa previously had the bomb, but has disarmed).

At a minimum, therefore, we are safe in saying that there are nine countries which have weapons would could be used for the purpose of conducting at least a rudimentary EMP laydown.

- Some of those countries are even known to have devoted special attention to producing or maintaining weapons which have been tailored to produce elevated levels of electromagnetic pulse....

Some Nuclear Weapons Have Been Intentionally Designed to Have Enhanced EMP Effects

- For example, we know from Congressional testimony that the United States has developed nuclear weapons which have been intentionally designed to produce enhanced EMP effects:

"In the late '70s and early '80s, I worked on "Third Generation" nuclear weaponry, a major component of which was nuclear explosive-driven generators of electromagnetic pulses of potentially greatly increased efficiency and military effectiveness; spinoffs involving non-nuclear means of generating potent EMP also engaged my attention."

Statement of Dr. Lowell Wood,

http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1997_h/h970716w.htm

The Soviets and "Super-EMP" Weapons

- 'In the 1990s, the [Russian] General Staff was aware of U.S. research into super-EMP nuclear weapons, which would generate a particularly powerful electromagnetic pulse capable of destroying even protected electronic systems. "From the early 1980s, U.S. military scientists ... aimed at creating ... a super-EMP [weapon] with intensified electromagnetic radiation output," General Belous accurately observed. "They figure to use it to increase the intensity of the field at the Earth's surface to several hundred kilovolts per meter." [*War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink*, by Peter V. Pry]
- Reportedly the Soviets were content with a simpler strategy: they simply retained very large (25MT) thermonuclear warheads in their stockpile for EMP-related use instead. A somewhat crude and inelegant strategy, but one which would certainly do the job.

“So Does That Mean You'd Need A Thermonuclear Weapon To Get EMP?”

- No. Sometimes, when folks notice that Starfish Prime was 1.45MT, or hear that Soviets retained large 25MT warheads for EMP-related purposes, or learn that the US devoted significant effort to tailoring EMP-enhanced weapons, they speculate that lesser nuclear weapons (such as non-thermonuclear fission weapons) might not be sufficient to produce EMP. Clearly, if that were to be the case, that would dramatically increase the threshold which would need to be surmounted in order to inflict an EMP attack.
- The testimony of weapons scientists, however, confirms that even modest fission weapons would be sufficient to produce significant EMP effects, and those modest yields might be all that's required to take advantage of the altitudes available from developing world launch vehicles.

Didn't Some Sort of "EMP Bomb" Already Get Used In Iraq or Kosovo?

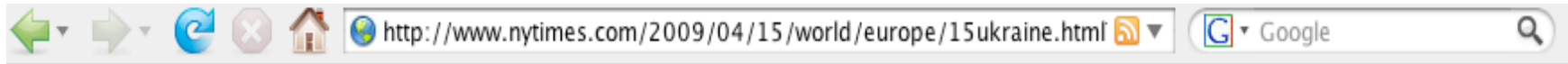
- You may be thinking of the so-called “Blackout Bomb” or “Soft Bomb” which shorted out power station transformers with conductive carbon fiber or graphite filaments – see the discussion and illustrations at <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/dumb/blu-114.htm>
- There's also an interesting discussion of high power microwave devices in the Congressional Research Service's “High Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse (HEMP) and High Power Microwave (HPM) Devices: Threat Assessments,” <http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RL32544.pdf>

Oh Yes: If You Did Want to Worry About Terrorist Access to Nuclear Material

- Check out GAO 02-426, "NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION: U.S. Efforts to Help Other Countries Combat Nuclear Smuggling Need Strengthened Coordination and Planning," <http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA403144&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf> discussing 181 confirmed cases of smuggling nuclear materials between 1993 and 2002.
- I'd also recommend PBS' "Loose Nukes: Investigating the Threat of Nuclear Smuggling," see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/nukes/>

Fair warning: that site correctly includes a quotation of a Russian proverb: "The less you know, the better you sleep."

Example of An Attempt To Obtain Nuclear Material



April 15, 2009

Ukraine Says 3 Tried to Sell Bomb Material

By [CLIFFORD J. LEVY](#)

MOSCOW — The metal cylinder supposedly contained eight pounds of plutonium 239, a highly dangerous radioactive material that could be used in a nuclear weapon or a dirty bomb. The price: \$10 million, sought by three Ukrainian men, officials said Tuesday.

The men did not make a sale, the officials said, but were arrested in an undercover operation in [Ukraine](#) last week that was conducted by the [Ukrainian Security Service](#). Still, while the plot was foiled, it underscored longstanding concerns that unsecured radioactive material in the former Soviet Union might fall into the wrong hands.

Marina Ostapenko, a spokeswoman for the Ukrainian Security Service, said it had turned out that the radioactive material was not plutonium 239. A preliminary analysis indicated that the material was most likely [americium](#), a much more common and less potent radioactive material, Ms. Ostapenko said in a telephone interview from Kiev, the Ukrainian capital.

She said americium could be deployed in a dirty bomb but not in a nuclear weapon.

"They wanted to sell it as plutonium," she said. "They were asking for \$10 million for it because they thought that it was

Uranium on the Loose

When the Soviet Union finally collapsed in December 1991, the United States could claim victory in the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama could declare the end of history, and some 280 million people could look forward to a

liberated future. But in fact the Soviet Union left its 15 successor states to navigate their own way to democracy and a market economy. And with some 22,000 tactical nuclear weapons—along with perhaps 1,200 tons of bomb-grade uranium—scattered under uncertain ownership and questionable supervision, the securing of the world's largest arsenal of nuclear materials became a matter of pressing concern.

Over the past decade and half, Russia—with extensive help from the United States—has tried to lock down this atomic detritus, at great expense. But the task is a massive one, and, as of 2008, the two nations face nuclear problems that scarcely registered during the upheaval of the 1990s. Seven years after 9/11, Russia has become something of a terrorists' nirvana, with 12,500 miles of borders, a military so corrupt that its members have sold weapons to their battlefield enemies, and vast networks of poorly safeguarded nuclear facilities.

Russia is likely the only place in the world where a man like Oleg Khintsagov, an ordinary, destitute, and dimwitted hustler, can pick up weapons-grade uranium and try to hawk it from his pockets. Khintsagov, and two other smugglers of similar means and aptitude—Garik Dadayan and Tamaz Dimitradze—are the subject of “[A Smuggler's Story](#),” Lawrence Scott Sheets' piece in the April issue of *The Atlantic*. The couriers Sheets describes are, to a man, poorly prepared for their missions, yet they have their hands on potentially catastrophic ingredients for an atomic bomb. The story Sheets tells is of a society in collapse in the face of separatist anxieties, ethnic animosities, and ambiguous borders—and of impoverished people seeking to feed their families in a radioactive land.

ARTICLE TOOLS

✉ E-MAIL ARTICLE

🖨️ PRINTER FORMAT

Thus I Believe All Requirements Which Need to Be Satisfied for An EMP Attack to Be Deemed A Credible Threat Have Been Met

- I believe, based on the information that's currently publicly available, that all the requirements needed to render potential use of EMP weapons against the United States as a plausible threat have been met.
- An EMP strike may not happen today or tomorrow or even next year, but I'd be extremely surprised if we don't see an EMP attack sometime within the next decade.
- Let me also make sure I explain why YOU should care about this risk, even if all it does is “just” kill some computers, computer networks, and power grids.

V. Conclusion

Our Society Isn't Just Enhanced By The Existence of the Internet, It Is Dependent On The Internet

- There may be an inclination to discount the impact that loss of computers, the Internet and America's power grid might cause. For example, some might be tempted to joke, "Haha, well at least I guess we'll all at least be getting less spam after that, right?"
- Unfortunately, I believe that without computers, the Internet, and the electrical power grid, our society would be prone to collapse.
- There would rapidly be regional or national shortages of food, water, critical medicines, basic consumer goods and gasoline.
- Business would slow to a standstill, unable to access capital, order raw materials, or accept new orders. Jobs would disappear.
- The government would be very hard pressed to maintain order.
- The potential effects of an EMP laydown are thus very serious and we need to do our utmost to insure we take appropriate precautions.

What Precautions Should We Be Taking?

- Harden systems, networks and power sources against EMP-related damage now, while we still have time and can easily do so.
Stockpiled critical spare parts in a shielded environment.
- Plan for how you or your neighbor's business would continue to operate without the availability of many electronic devices, electrical power, or the Internet. Are you ready to employ manual backup processes? Do you have more than just-in-time levels of inventory on hand? Could you operate on a cash-only basis? What if you can't scan items to find out what they're supposed to cost?
- Don't forget your own family. Do you have multiple months worth of food on hand? How would you get drinking water? If an attack happened in winter, would you have fuel to stay warm while the electricity's out? Do you have reserves of any medicines you need?
- Work to insure that our officials are thinking about these issues, and insist that they plan and take other appropriate steps.

Some Final “Take Aways”

- Even if you aren’t a specialist in nuclear weapons effects, credible government experts have been trying to tell us for years that electromagnetic pulse is a serious issue. We need to listen to them.
- We can protect against EMP through use of shielding and filtering. Most electronic devices come with relatively little inherent protection, so we need to add supplemental external shielding to obtain protection. We can add that shielding gradually, beginning with our highest value/most irreplaceable electronic assets.
- Given that little attention is being paid to this issue on the national scale, we need to pay attention to this issue on the local/regional scale, particularly since if an EMP attack does occur, emergency support resources will likely be overwhelmed over a large area. Lane County will likely need to fend for itself.
- Simple technologies and once-common skills from a hundred years ago may unfortunately once again become very useful.