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GAS DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

by

William H. Cary, Jr.
Sanitary Engineer (R), USPHS
Sixth and Seventh Civilian Defense Regions

(This material has been reviewed and edited by the Gas Protection Section of the Medical Division of the Office of Civilian Defense, Washington, D. C.)

The phase of gas defense in which doctors are primarily interested is only one part of the gas defense program of the U. S. Office of Civilian Defense. It is advisable that the physician who is to serve in the Emergency Medical Service, and who may be called upon at some time to treat gas casualties, be informed of duties and functions of related Units of the Citizens Defense Corps, particularly those Units which have special duties in case gas is used.

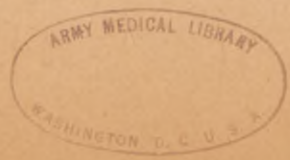
The responsibilities of the medical personnel of the U. S. Citizens Defense Corps have been taken up elsewhere. The chief portion of this discussion therefore will deal with the non-medical phases of gas defense. First of all a brief outline of the organization of the Office of Civilian Defense and the Citizens Defense Corps should be given.

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The U. S. Office of Civilian Defense is a Federal emergency agency established by Executive Order of the President. The present Director of the agency is James M. Landis. The agency is divided into three main branches, the Protection Branch, Civilian War Services Branch, and the Administrative Branch. It is the Protection Branch in which we are primarily interested. The Protection Branch contains three divisions: the Medical Division, Protection Division, and the Facility Security Division. The supervision of gas organization and training has been placed in the Gas Protection Section of the Medical Division.

In order to function more efficiently, the responsibilities of the National Office have been delegated in part to nine Regional Offices of Civilian Defense which are coterminous with the nine Service Commands of the Army. The Regional Offices of Civilian Defense have, in general, the same organization as the National Office. They serve as the liaison between the National Office and the States, and their chief function is to carry out policies which have been determined

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nationally. The gas program is under the general supervision of the Regional Medical Officer, but is carried on by the Gas Officer or by the Regional Sanitary Engineer acting in that capacity.

Operations Letter No. 91 has suggested procedures for the State and local Defense Councils to follow in making the appointment of a State Gas Consultant and Senior Gas Officers. The State Gas Consultant is expected to supply technical advice to the State Defense Council and to the Senior Gas Officers of the local communities within his State. He is further charged with carrying out the training program of the State in gas defense and with transmitting the recommendations from the Regional Office and the State Defense Council to the local Defense Councils and Senior Gas Officers. All of the organization which has been discussed thus far is advisory and consultative to the local defense organization except for such authority as may be exercised by the State under State defense laws. The local defense organization is responsible for protection of the individual community in the event of attack, not the State, Regional, or National offices dealing with civilian defense. On the local level, the responsibility for protection is vested in the local section of the U. S. Citizens Defense Corps headed by a Commander and made up of the Emergency Services, such as Emergency Medical, Emergency Fire, Emergency Police, Air Raid Wardens, Emergency Public Works, Emergency Welfare, Emergency Utilities, and Rescue. The Chiefs of these Services are members of the staff of the Commander which, in addition, includes the Health Officer, Personnel Officer, Property Officer, Water Works Officer, Transport Officer, Plant Protection Officer, Communications Officer, and Senior Gas Officer among others.

The Senior Gas Officer, through the authority of the Commander, is responsible for establishing an efficient gas defense organization and training all Citizens Defense Corps personnel in gas defense. In large cities, he should be assisted by Assistant Gas Officers to whom may be delegated specific duties which are a part of the Senior Gas Officer's responsibilities. In addition to these aides, the Senior Gas Officer directs a group of field representatives known as Gas Reconnaissance Agents who in case of a gas attack will be responsible for identification of gas in this field, delimitation of the gassed areas, and rendering technical supervision and advice to other Units of the Citizens Defense Corps (including decontamination personnel) which may be sent to the gas incident or whose duties may be effected by the presence of gas. Gas Reconnaissance Agents are dispatched by the Senior Gas Officer to reported gas incidents and report directly to him their findings and their recommendations when the incident has been investigated.

Before going into further detail concerning duties of the Senior Gas Officer, Gas Reconnaissance Agents and Air Raid Wardens, something should be said concerning training of these Gas Specialists. The U. S. Office of Civilian Defense in all of its recommendations to the State and local Defense Councils has suggested the recruitment of technically trained persons, particularly chemists, for the positions of Senior Gas Officer and Gas Reconnaissance Agent. It is the belief of this office that the background and training of such men make them especially qualified for these positions with the minimum of training. Gas Specialist Courses for this training were organized through arrangement with the War Department Civilian Protection Schools. These were located at Amherst College at Amherst, Massachusetts; Purdue University at Lafayette, Indiana; Loyola University at New Orleans, Louisiana; Occidental College at Los Angeles, California; Stanford University at Palo Alto, California; and the University of Washington at Seattle, Washington. The Gas Specialist Course at these Schools consisted of five days instruction and demonstration. (On July 1, 1943, four of these schools were discontinued. The personnel and equipment of the School at Amherst were moved to Edgewood Arsenal and the personnel and equipment at Stanford University were moved to San Francisco. Civilian defense workers nominated by the Regional Office of Civilian Defense will be trained in these two schools during the coming year.) Approximately 1,200 individuals attended the Gas Specialist Courses at the War Department Civilian Protection Schools from December, 1942, to July 1, 1943.

These Gas Specialist Courses were for State Gas Consultants, Senior Gas Officers, and Gas Reconnaissance Agents. In many cases, important industrial plants and utilities sent men to these schools for training. It was planned that these individuals, after completion of the Gas Specialist Course, would carry the program home and organize training for others in their communities, just as it is planned that the individuals attending the present three-day course on the Medical Aspects of Chemical Warfare will carry back the information they have obtained and use it in instructing physicians in their own medical schools.

On the local level a gas defense program can be divided into three main classifications; the cleansing of persons and the treatment of casualties caused by chemical warfare agents, the protection of the general population from the effects of chemical agents, and education of the public in the possibilities of chemical attack and self-aid in the case of contamination. Physicians, of course, are primarily interested in the cleansing of injured persons who are contaminated and in the treatment of chemical casualties. It is unnecessary to elaborate on this phase of the gas program since it is a main subject of this course.

The best way to show how gas protection would operate would be to follow through a hypothetical gas incident. If it is presumed that a gas bomb has fallen along with high explosives in a certain section of a large city, the following train of events could be expected to ensue. The Air Raid Warden in whose sector the incident occurred dons a gas mask, sounds the gas alarm, warning people to seek shelters in their homes. He then reports the incident immediately to the Control Center. This report, receiving special attention, is brought immediately to the attention of the Senior Gas Officer and the representatives of the various services. The Senior Gas Officer calls the Gas Reconnaissance Agent responsible for the sector involved and orders him to the incident. The Gas Reconnaissance Agent upon arrival at the incident verifies the presence of gas, identifies it by means of special detection equipment, and advises the Air Raid Warden and any other protection personnel at the incident what measures must be taken to protect the population. Upon identification of the gas as a chemical warfare agent, the Gas Reconnaissance Agent notifies the Senior Gas Officer by telephone. He, in turn, makes recommendations as to the action, if any, to be taken by the Control Center. For example, he might request that emergency decontamination be carried out in order to prevent interruption of activity, or he might recommend the evacuation of people from a certain area. In either case the Senior Gas Officer confers with the Chiefs of Services and sees that the recommended action is undertaken. When the presence of war gas, particularly a vesicant, is substantiated by such a report from the field, gas cleansing stations are immediately activated and staffed, preparatory to receiving contaminated injured persons. The Health Department makes preparations to insure that the water supply is tested for war gas contamination and that any exposed food is inspected, analyzed, and destroyed if necessary. It should be noted here that actually the Health Department is carrying on its normal function even in this instance. The Decontamination Unit is activated, preparatory to decontaminating selected areas, when the attack is over.

This gives a fairly complete picture of what should occur during actual attack in which chemical warfare agents are used. The Senior Gas Officer has a great many responsibilities in connection with the establishment of this local gas protection. Almost every person in the Citizens Defense Corps in the course of his normal duties during attack may be exposed to the war gases, therefore each person must be trained in what the war gases are, what they do, how injury from them can be avoided, and self-aid in case of contamination. In addition to this training, the Senior Gas Officer is responsible for technical advice in connection with the establishment of cleansing stations and for the technical training of the Decontamination Unit. When cleansing stations are planned by the Chief of Emergency Medical Service, he should have as his advisor the Senior Gas Officer, who will be able to help him, in many instances, to establish stations which will function properly in time of need.

The third phase of gas defense, the education of the public, involves the medical personnel of the Emergency Medical Service as well as the Senior Gas Officer. It is not desirable to attempt a thorough instruction of the public in the technical details of the chemical warfare agents and how they act, but it is desirable to point out certain facts about chemical warfare which will show the public how these materials are overrated as death-dealing agents. It is also desirable that the public be taught a few simple procedures by which people can avoid injury if they are exposed. Perhaps the most important phase of public education is the explanation of the simple measures involved in self-aid in the case of vesicant contamination. While this could be done by the Senior Gas Officer and his assistants, it will be much better received if it is given by a medically trained person. The injuries caused by chemical agents would, of course, be treated by physicians and the public will be much more ready to accept as authoritative, measures which those same physicians tell them will minimize the effects of chemical agents after they have become contaminated. This training of the public can only be achieved satisfactorily by having close cooperation between the Senior Gas Officer and the Chief of Emergency Medical Service.

The listing of the actual duties of the various Units of the Citizens Defense Corps in case of gas attack will be found in Operations Letter No. 104. Measures recommended for self-aid and for the treatment of injuries caused by chemical agents will be found in Operations Letter No. 128 and Office of Civilian Defense publication 2202-1, "First Aid in the Prevention and Treatment of Chemical Casualties."

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