Administrative History

On March 28, 1919, the Legislature established the State Council of Defense of Nevada. The agency had been in existence since 1917 but without a statutory basis. It ceased operations in 1920.

On March 8, 1941, several months before the United States entered World War II, Governor Edward P. Carville revived the Council. Funding came from legislative authorization for the State Board of Examiners to use up to $10,000 in case of "great necessity and extreme emergency." The Council's membership represented all of the state's counties.

Following Carville's suggestion, the Legislature passed the Civilian Defense Act of 1943, which created a new Council of Defense and abolished the old one. The statute designated the Governor as the chairman of the Council; he was to appoint its members and a Director, who were to serve without pay. The Council was empowered to organize county and community councils of defense. Among the more important powers, duties, and responsibilities granted to the Director were to cooperate with federal agencies; ascertain the availability of food, land, labor, industrial resources, and state facilities necessary to carry out the provisions of the act; respond to air raids; and to prescribe and direct activities to the extent that voluntary civilian participation was related to the war effort. The statute also defined the duties of the county councils. Finally, the Civilian Defense Act insisted that federal rules and regulations were paramount and that the state Council's actions be in harmony with federal authorities (Nevada was part of the Ninth Civilian Defense Region). The Council received a federal appropriation of $15,000.

Nevada's Council functioned as a state adjunct to the federal government's Office of Civilian Defense (OCD). This agency began as the Division of State and Local Cooperation, Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense (1940-1941). An executive order of May 20, 1941, placed OCD in the Office of Emergency Management.

Throughout the war Hugh A. Shamberger served as director of the state's Council. In 1942 he explained that helping to win the war was the principal objective of civilian defense, and that its main roles were "to enlist, organize and train volunteer personnel for the protection of civilian life and property and . . . to mobilize every man, woman and child in carrying on

programs essential to this war effort and seeing to it that everyone is throwing his full weight into this war." By mid-1942 there were sixty county and community councils of defense.

Among the organizations operating under the Council of Defense were the Civil Air Patrol, U. S. Citizens' Defense Corps, U. S. Citizens' Service Corps, Aircraft Warning Service, Junior Citizens Service Corps, and the Forest and Range Fire Fighters Service. Non-governmental organizations with which the Council cooperated included the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, University of Nevada, American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Federal agencies with which the Council worked closely were, among others, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Forest Service, Grazing Service, Soil Conservation Service, Office of Price Administration, and the armed forces. An executive order of June 4, 1945 abolished the OCD, effective June 30.

The Nevada State Council of Defense continued to function until after the war. Some of its unexpended funds were transferred to the Veterans Advisory Committee; others went to the state Department of Education. In 1951 the Legislature granted the director of the Council a salary and authorized him to employ a chief stenographer. The same act allocated $21,500 to the Council for the period April 1, 1951 to June 30, 1953.

Nevada's Civil Defense Act of 1953 repealed the legislation of 1943 and 1951 and created the Civil Defense Agency. A statute of 1965 changed the name to the Civil Defense and Disaster Agency. It became a division of the Department of the Military in 1981; in 1983 it became the Division of Emergency Management. Legislation of 1993 transferred the division to the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety.

Records of the Nevada State Council of Defense, World War II

General Files 1941-1946, 19 cu. ft. Arranged by subject and thereunder chronologically. File list available.

The files document civilian defense activities typical of the World War II era. Many of them

concern the various volunteer organizations operating under the U. S. Office of Civilian Defense (OCD), whose recommendations, regulations, and requests were transmitted to citizens through the Nevada State Council of Defense (NSCD). The volunteer organizations included: the Civil Air Patrol, U. S. Citizens' Defense Corps, U. S. Citizens' Service Corps, Junior Citizens' Service Corps, Aircraft Warning Service, and the Forest and Range Fire Fighters Service.

Other organizations working with the NSCD were the Red Cross, Boys Scouts, Girl Scouts, University of Nevada, American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The files contain incoming and outgoing correspondence, memoranda, and telegrams. Most of these communications are among the OCD, the NSCD, county and local councils of defense, and the councils of defense of other states. The NSCD was in communication with agencies and branches of the federal government other than the OCD, such as the Forest Service, Grazing Service, Soil Conservation Service, Office of Price Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the armed forces.

Among the other records are Enrollment for Civilian Defense cards, with which citizens indicated their willingness and availability to serve in the volunteer organizations and their qualifications for doing so.

There is also much printed matter: manuals and pamphlets (mostly issued by the OCD), posters, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, the NSCD's Defense News Letter, and typescripts of speeches (including radio addresses).

Major subjects of the files include transportation; communication (e.g., amateur radio); air raid defense (wardens, blackouts); medical services (e. g., first aid training); bomb reconnaissance and disposal; Japanese balloon bombs; chemical warfare (e. g., gas mask information); auxiliary police and fire protection; uniforms and insignia; rationing; victory gardens; nutrition information; food preparation and preservation; recreation; salvage collection (scrap metal, rubber, kitchen fats); disaster relief; child care; price controls; war bond sales; and the operation of Basic Magnesium, Inc., Nevada's only significant defense plant.

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