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Digging In At Israeli Bomb Shelter

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I have to say that there is a certain relaxing aspect to being in Israel right now. While everyone back in the U.S. is in a tizzy trying to figure out how to deal with the current war and possible terrorist attacks, life here is amazingly calm.

For instance, I don't have to worry about where my bomb shelter is. The one at home is 30 yards from my door. At the research institute near Tel Aviv where I am working, there are a number all over the place. And at my Hebrew language school, it is just three flights down and out the door.

Now if I were back in New York City, I'd have no clue. Let's face it, except for the NYC's emergency management office, I don't think there are any shelters anywhere. So there is a certain sense of safety to living in Israel where new buildings are required by law to have a shelter.



Associated Press

An Israeli soldier shows a youth how to wear a gas mask.

A quick description of the shelter. It is made up of two sections. Between the outside and the outer section is an airtight door. Between the outer and inner sections is another airtight door. In this outer room there are showers. I don't know about you, but the thought of sending a bunch of Jews into an airtight room with showers to save their life makes me queasy. Actually the showers are in case one is caught outside during a chemical attack. You can go into the shelter and wash off. Not that there are any clothes to put on after you shower. But that shouldn't be a problem. After all, there are no drains for these showers.

The other nice thing where I work is that they have provided the foreign workers with both gas masks and a syringe of atropine/TA which provides a preliminary treatment against nerve agents. And if I don't use either, I can keep them as a souvenir and maybe I'll end up using them when I move back to New York.

We were also shown two instructional videos. The first about how to use the mask was in Hebrew and subtitled in English and Russian. The second video was how to use the syringe and was subtitled only in Russian. It must be that since so many of us English speakers are drug addicts, we will just know instinctively how to use a syringe.

I took the gas mask back to my office and, when I opened the box the first thing I noticed was that the gas mask was German. More bad historical memories. Then I tried to put it on. This proved to be quite an ordeal. First, the five buckles had these short tabs in them which had to be removed before you can adjust the strap to your head. That took 15 minutes. Then when I tried to

adjust the straps they still wouldn't move and took another 15 minutes to figure out how to adjust. In frustration, I took the mask back to where they were being passed out and showed the folks there how difficult they are to use.

I pointed out that it took a total of 30 minutes to adjust the mask properly and that when the sirens go off we will have only three minutes to get to the shelter and get the masks on. This clearly would be a problem. One person there said that everyone should try their masks on beforehand. But I mentioned that the box said "Do Not Open" (which I had obviously ignored) and that most people would probably wait until hearing the sirens before opening the box. Someone else said that he had been in the army and from his experience, when your adrenaline gets going you can do anything quick. Boy, *thatwas* reassuring.

The bottom line is that I was asked if I would write up a detailed description of how to adjust the mask which would be e-mailed to all the foreign workers. So there I was, an American who had only held a gas mask in his hands for less than an hour and I was suddenly the resident expert. This was all too surreal. But I did as asked, the e-mail went out to all, and I am now the Gas Mask Maven here at the Institute. So if you folks back in the U.S. have any questions about your gas masks, just drop me a line.

Daniel Wold Savin, a native of New London, is an atomic physicist working on a year-long research fellowship in Israel. ■

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