

CALIFORNIA
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Bulletin





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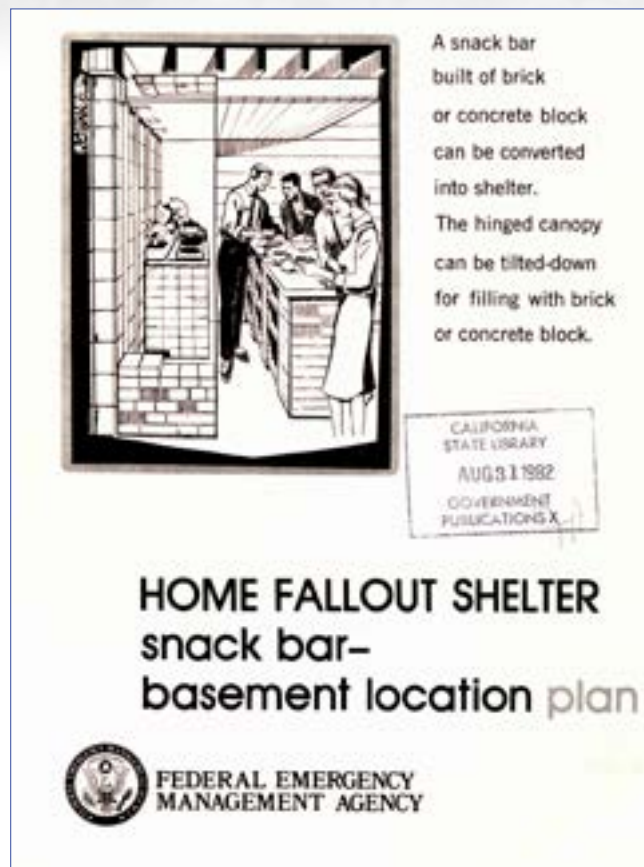
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Officially Scary

Spooktacular Government Publications for Halloween

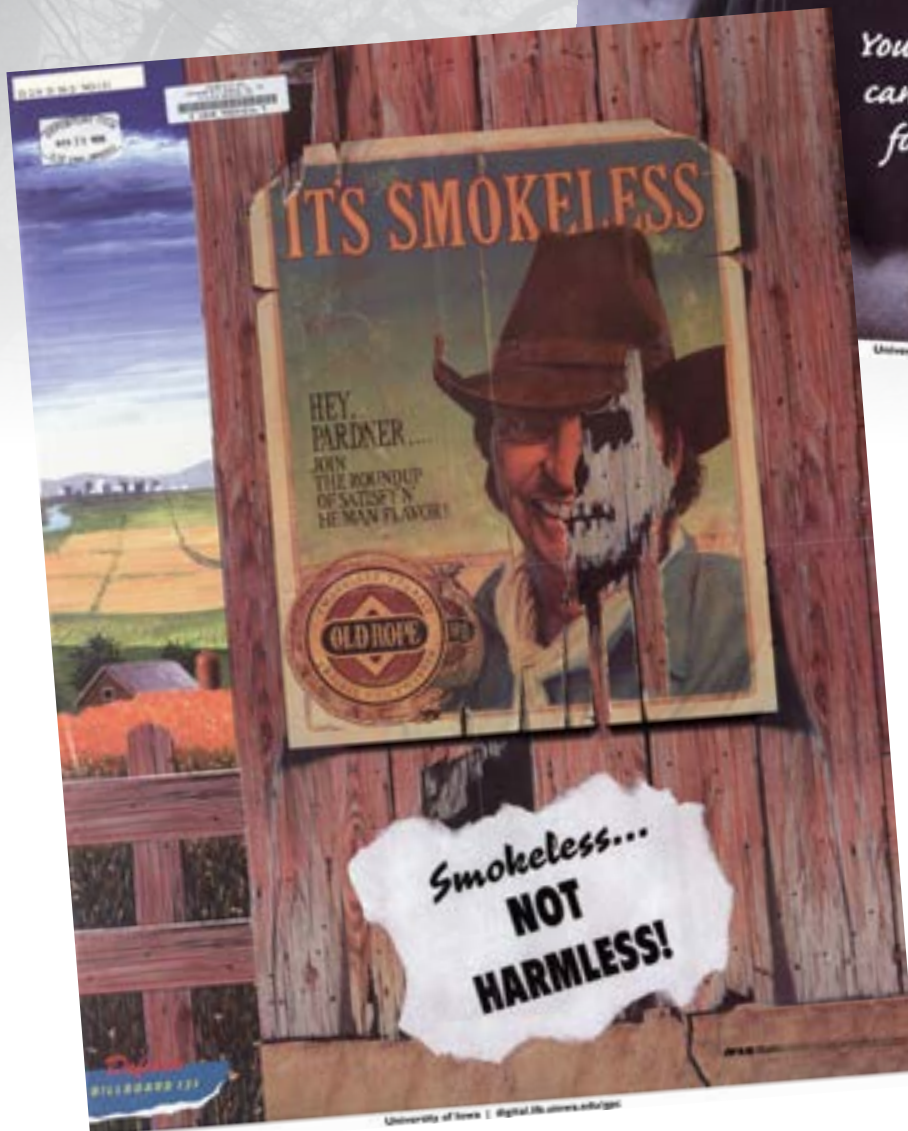
By Emily Blodget, Government Publications Librarian



*It's all snacks and smiles
until the mushroom clouds rise.*

Government publications aren't the first place anyone looks for good Halloween scares. Regular scares, perhaps—the U.S. Department of Labor's *Fatalgram* series describes horrifying workplace deaths, and FEMA's 1980 design for a basement snack bar which doubles as a fallout shelter is also pretty frightening.¹ But dressing in '80s fashion to hang out in a cinderblock snack bar while contemplating nuclear war isn't everyone's idea of a scary good time.

*It's official:
blood-sucking
vampires care more
about your health
than chain-smoking
cowboys.*



Fortunately, there are plenty of government publications tapping into more traditional Halloween iconography.

Some agencies use Halloween imagery to emphasize the horrors of bad health. The American Forces Information Service, for example, literally peels back the glamor of a Marlboro Man-lookalike to show his skull beneath, a grim prediction of the consequences of smoking.² A friendly Dracula reassures servicemembers that it only takes a drop of blood to get their cholesterol tested.³

You should know
to avoid these risky
driving acts, and
being constructed
from corpse parts
is no excuse for
harassing your
coworkers.



Other spooky posters warn against bad behaviors like driving in the blind spot,⁴ drunk driving,⁵ and sexual harassment.⁶

Some risky behaviors are more niche than others. In 1954, the California State Fire Marshal and State Board of Dry Cleaners produced a pamphlet warning of the dangers of chemicals used in dry cleaning. More specifically, it showed cartoon characters dying horribly because they tried to do their own dry cleaning at home. To describe these grisly fates, the agencies eschewed the usual dry government prose in favor of limericks. Two examples:

*A plump little lady named Jean,
Was famed for not using her bean.
She used gasoline,
To keep her clothes clean,
And lately she hasn't been seen.*

*Take a lesson from Mrs. McKlass,
Who kept flammable liquid in glass.
When it crashed to the floor,
Fire spread with a roar,
Now she lies 'neath a blanket of grass.*

They included a list of safety precautions to take “if it becomes necessary in an emergency to do dry cleaning at home.” What might constitute a dry-cleaning emergency is not explained.⁷

