CARRYING OF GAS MASKS BY THE PUBLIC.

Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security.

I attach a copy of a Report by the Home Defence Committee (H.D. (42) 5).

This Report was made at my request following the receipt of proposals from the C.-in-C., Home Forces (reproduced as Annex I to the Report) that soldiers should no longer carry their gas masks when at their stations save on duty and in certain defined circumstances.

Having regard to the rubber situation, as well as the present disregard by the public of the injunction always to carry gas masks, I am of opinion that it will be better to follow the policy advocated by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, subject to my having the assurance that the Government is reasonably likely to be able to give a warning before the use of gas by Germany on any large scale. I believe that, when it becomes necessary to give the public such a warning, it will come with much greater force if the recommended relaxation has first been allowed.

I therefore ask the approval of the Cabinet to my adopting the policy recommended in the Report, subject to my reserving judgment on the methods by which the public should be kept up to scratch on the regular inspection of respirators, until I can consult Regional Commissioners. It would be understood that this policy would only be put into operation in conjunction with a similar policy for the Fighting Services.

H.M.

HOME OFFICE.
12th February 1942.
WAR CABINET.

HOME DEFENCE COMMITTEE.

CARRYING OF GAS MASKS.

Report to the Minister of Home Security.

1. You have referred for our consideration the general question of the need for the general wearing of respirators in present circumstances. On the basis of a note put in by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, (Annex I) we considered at the same time the allied question whether service personnel should be relieved of the necessity to carry their respirators until the invasion warning "Stand To" is issued. In particular you have asked us to advise you as to whether there is a likelihood of large-scale gas attacks before invasion and, if so, whether adequate warning can be safely expected.

2. Experience of the enemy's methods indicates that, having selected an objective, he concentrates all his strength and efforts on it. While invasion remains a possibility it is highly improbable that he would reduce the very considerable surprise value of the gas weapon in invasion by using it in advance on an operation against this country of quite minor importance. This view is supported by strategical considerations. In the view of the Air Staff, the balance of advantage would be with the Allies if the Axis powers did begin the use of gas. They are of opinion that the likelihood of gas attack on this country unaccompanied by invasion is remote. In accepting this conclusion we have borne in mind the effect on the enemy's intentions of the knowledge that the public were not carrying their masks. We are satisfied that this would be outweighed by other and more important factors and would not affect the enemy's calculations, provided our arrangements for maintaining anti-gas efficiency are adequate.

3. No alteration of the equipment of aircraft is needed for the use of gas bombs instead of high explosive bombs and the chance that an individual German air commander might decide to include a proportion of gas bombs in a bomb load contrary to the policy of his Government though possible is highly improbable. Clearly no warning of such an attack can be given, and although for the reasons set out above we consider such attacks unlikely, we are of opinion that it would be a wise precaution to require Civil Defence workers to carry their respirators when on duty. We understand that the possibility of applying this rule to the police, particularly police on duty at night, is under consideration by the Ministry of Home Security in consultation with the Home Office.

4. We understand that certain transport drivers (both road and rail) are at present required by their employers to carry their respirators with them if their duties take them from home at night. As a further safeguard against the isolated raid we consider that this rule should be applied to members of the public sleeping away from home.

5. Once invasion has been mounted, gas attacks may begin at any time with little or no warning. For this reason we are of opinion that the instruction to carry masks should not be rigidly related to the issue of "Stand To" and we would suggest instead that the governing factor should be "when the risk increases again". This phrase might replace the words "at all times from
6. It is vital that the proposed relief to the civil population should not impair in any way the efficiency of our anti-gas preparations and we attach great importance to measures to ensure that respirators are periodically tested and that the public are exercised in wearing and inspecting them. We have considered a number of suggestions to achieve these objects including

(a) the nomination of the first day of each month as "gas day" when everyone (Service personnel as well as civilians) would be required to carry, inspect and test his respirator by actual use.

(b) the increased use on these days of tear gas demonstrations and mobile gas vans for testing respirators.

We regard both these suggestions as valuable and recommend that they be very seriously examined. We understand that for a number of reasons it would be impracticable to enforce the rule that respirators should be carried throughout a given day every month, but we feel that a relaxation should depend on prior approval of adequate plans for attaining the purpose we have in mind in this paragraph; much might be done by suitable publicity in the conditions created by the new policy.

7. We have considered the draft notice to the public annexed to the Memorandum prepared by the Ministry of Home Security. We agree generally with it, subject to certain amendments which we have incorporated in the revise which we append at Annex II. We consider that it should not be issued until the arrangements for testing respirators by actual use referred to in paragraph 6 are complete.

8. We were informed that the broad policy set out in the Commander-in-Chief's Memorandum (as amended in paragraph 4 above) is accepted by the Service Departments. It is important that the three Services should take common action to order that respirators should be carried or dispensed with but they should be free at any time of emergency to take immediate independent action. We understand that adequate machinery exists for consultation between them. We agree with the instructions for Army personnel suggested by the Commander-in-Chief, and we recommend that they should be applied mutatis mutandis by the other Service Departments.

9. Following is a summary of our conclusions:

(a) There is no reason to suppose that the enemy will use gas in attacks on this country until invasion occurs. The knowledge that respirators are not being carried is very unlikely to affect the enemy's calculations.

(b) Advice to the public should be synchronised with orders to Service personnel.

(c) All civil defence workers on duty should be required to carry their respirators; the application of this rule to the police should be examined.
(d) It is of vital importance that the proposed relief should not reduce the efficiency of our anti-gas preparations and in particular stringent measures should be taken to ensure that respirators are tested periodically. The Ministry of Home Security should consider the practicability of securing this by such methods as the use of tear gas demonstrations and mobile gas vans.

(e) The draft public notice as amended should be issued when the machinery for testing respirators by actual use is ready to operate. It should include notification of the tests and measures to be adopted.

(f) The rule in the Commander-in-Chief's memorandum that respirators should be carried from "Stand to" should be amended to provide for the issue of an order at any time when the risk increases again. The instructions suggested by the Commander-in-Chief for the Army should be applied mutatis mutandis to the other services.

10. We have forwarded a copy of this report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee for their information.

(Signed) S.F. STEWART.

GREAT GEORGE STREET, S.W.1.

2nd February, 1942.
MEMORANDUM BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, HOME FORCES.

CARRIAGE OF GAS RESPIRATORS.

1. Consideration has been given to the various ways in which the GERMANS might first employ gas against this country, with a view to determining whether the present rules regarding the carriage of respirators should not be relaxed under present conditions.

2. In order to obtain the maximum advantage from the initial use of gas, and to limit retaliation by us against towns in GERMANY, it appears probable that the GERMANS will begin this form of warfare on, or immediately previous to, attempted invasion.

Such action would be in accordance with the military principles adopted by the GERMANS in this war. I cannot of course say that this method is a certainty, but I consider it sufficiently likely to justify reviewing our policy for the carriage of gas masks, particularly in view of the shortage of rubber.

3. I therefore recommend that in the interests of the war effort as a whole we accept a small degree of risk under present conditions, and endeavour to save the wear and tear caused to respirators by constant carriage. It would be necessary in that case, to enforce with the utmost strictness the carriage of respirators by everybody at all times from "STAND TO".

4. It is suggested therefore, that, as regards the Army, instructions should be as follows:

   (a) A soldier will Carry his respirator.

     (i) At all times in F.S. marching order.

     (ii) At any other time ordered by his Commanding Officer.

     (iii) On guard and piquets.

     (iv) After "STAND TO".

   (b) A soldier when absent from his station will take his respirator with him. He need not carry it, except under the conditions of para. 4 (a) above.

5. As regards the civil population, it is noted that, in the country as a whole, only a small proportion of the population now obey the injunction to carry their gas masks with them. It is suggested that a more practical order, and one that would be more likely to be obeyed, would be that gas masks -

   (a) should not normally be carried, but should accompany the individual if sleeping away from the normal place of residence.

   (b) should be taken out and inspected on the first day of every month.

   (c) after the issue of a warning through the B.B.C. and the press, should be carried by everybody at all times and in all circumstances.

6. The above orders would of course be cancelled if Chemical Warfare started in any theatre of war.
ANNEX II

DRAFT NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC ABOUT GAS MASKS

The war with Japan will affect the supply of rubber available in this country. This fact will call for much greater care in the use of gas masks by the whole population at home, so as to reduce the rate of damage and replacement and conserve supplies.

A main cause of damage is the shock and bumping that is inevitable when gas masks are continually carried and the Government being of opinion that it will be possible to give some hours warning at least of the probability of large scale gas attack, it has therefore been decided that the best course for the public to adopt in present circumstances is not to carry their gas masks at all times, but to leave them at their place of residence where they can be reached easily in case of need. ANYONE SLEEPING AWAY FROM HOME SHOULD CARRY HIS MASK WITH HIM.

This does not mean that the risk of gas attack is regarded as past. On the contrary the Civil Defence services are continuing with full preparations and training in anti-gas measures, including decontamination and cleansing and the public likewise should keep in mind the instructions and advice previously given.

It follows that when they are not being carried, gas masks should always be kept in a particular place, easy to reach, but away from the risks of knocks and movement. They are the responsibility of the individuals who use them and whose life may depend on them. Great care should be taken to ensure that they are in proper condition and they should be examined every three or four weeks to see that they are in good repair. Any damage should at once be reported to the Civil Defence warden.

IF RISK OF GAS ATTACK INCREASES, THE GOVERNMENT WILL ISSUE A WARNING AND FROM THAT TIME MASKS MUST BE CARRIED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

(Note: Details of the measures for ensuring the maintenance of adequate anti-gas precautions will be inserted when they have been decided upon).