This week marks the 77th year for remembrance of the atomic bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At 8:16 in the morning of August 6, 1945, people were going about their usual morning activities when the bomb exploded in Hiroshima. Three days later, at 11:02 am on August 9th, the bomb over Nagasaki exploded and fourteen thousand homes burst into flames. In both cities, the victims never saw it coming.

All together, there were about 540,000 citizens living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Approximately 110,000 people died instantaneously from the bombings. Another 110,000 perished within five months from the combined effects of three components of physical energy generated by nuclear fission: blast wind (pressure), radiant heat, and ionizing radiation.

Our remembrance of atomic bomb victims is critical for understanding today’s threat of nuclear weapons. Our concern is not as much about World War II as about the unimaginable annihilation of innocent populations in a future war involving nuclear-armed nations. We face a nuclear weapons threat that also involves the risks of an accident, an accidental launch or unintended launch, and use by terrorists.

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive, inhumane, and indiscriminate weapons ever created. They are unlike any other weapons in the scale of the devastation they cause combined with their uniquely damaging radioactive fallout. A single nuclear bomb detonated over a large city could kill millions of people. The use of dozens or hundreds of nuclear bombs would disrupt the global climate, causing widespread famine.

Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor is located just 70 miles south of Bellingham and is homeport to the largest concentration of deployed nuclear weapons in the United States. The nuclear warheads are deployed on Trident D-5 missiles on SSBN submarines and are stored in an underground nuclear weapons storage facility on the base.

There are eight Trident SSBN submarines deployed at Bangor. One Trident SSBN submarine at Bangor is estimated to carry about 90 nuclear warheads. The W76-1 and W88 warheads at Bangor are equal respectively to 90 kilotons and 455 kilotons of TNT in destructive force. Each of the submarines at Bangor are deployed with a destructive force equal to more than 1,200 Hiroshima-sized nuclear bombs.

Our proximity to the largest number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons in the U.S. puts us in range of a dangerous local and international threat. When citizens become aware of their role in the prospect of nuclear war, or the risk of a nuclear accident, the issue is no longer an abstraction. Our proximity to Bangor demands a deeper response.

Remembering the atomic bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is essential to preventing the use of nuclear weapons from happening again.