

March 26, 2003

Ms. Nancy Kochanowicz  
29 Van Wyck Street  
Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520-2525

Dear Ms. Kochanowicz:

I am responding to your letter dated February 21, 2003, to the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in which you expressed concerns regarding an incident at your local school, and its implication on emergency planning for the areas surrounding the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. In this regard, the NRC closely monitors nuclear power plants to ensure that they are maintained and operated in accordance with NRC regulations. Our regulations require that comprehensive emergency plans be prepared and periodically exercised to assure that actions can and will be taken to protect citizens in the vicinity of a nuclear power plant.

At the Federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has the lead in offsite emergency planning and response for nuclear power plants. The NRC assists FEMA in carrying out this role. The NRC has responsibility for the onsite emergency planning and requires nuclear plant operators to have detailed procedures for handling accidents, making timely notification to appropriate authorities, and providing accurate radiological information.

Emergency planning is a dynamic process and, as a result, emergency response plans are periodically updated. FEMA, with the assistance of the Regional Assistance Committee, a panel of experts in various aspects of emergency preparedness from a number of Federal agencies, periodically reviews these plans. These reviews have consistently indicated that the emergency response plans for Indian Point provide a sound framework for effective decision making and implementation of essential emergency preparedness functions. While the emergency response plans have been found adequate, FEMA, the State, the counties, and Entergy are working closely on further enhancements. These enhancements consider such issues as the locations of school reception centers and traffic control contingencies.

While FEMA provides oversight for emergency preparedness, the State and counties are responsible for the development of emergency response plans to deal with emergencies of many types. Although we suggest that you share your concerns regarding this specific incident with the local school district or individual school so that they can address these issues, as needed, in the school's specific response plans, we understand your concern regarding emergency planning, in general. We note that FEMA, in a letter to the State dated February 21, 2003, is continuing its review of individual school district plans and other factors involving emergency planning.

With regard to the concern raised in your letter about the inability to hear the emergency sirens at your residence, we have learned that the licensee recently tested newly upgraded sirens during the period you describe. There are three sirens that are intended to cover the Van Wyck Street/Old Post Road area. The licensee conducted announced, quarterly tests of these sirens on January 22, February 5 and February 6, 2003, respectively. During these tests, the sirens were activated for ten seconds. Since the sirens did not reach full volume during these tests, it is quite possible that residents would not hear them. Also, although the licensee's announcements regarding the tests indicate the date and time of the test, it is not unusual for the tests to be conducted outside the announced time frame. Full three-minute, full volume, announced tests of the sirens are conducted annually. Sounding of sirens does not necessarily indicate the need for immediate evacuation; rather the function of the siren system is to notify the public that an event has occurred and to direct the public to listen to the emergency broadcast system for further instructions.

Thank you for your interest in these matters. We have also forwarded your letter to FEMA Region II. If you should have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at 610-337-5080.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Brian Holian, Deputy Director  
Division of Reactor Projects

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