

April 24, 2003

Ms. Janet S. Hardwick  
District Clerk, Board of Education  
East Ramapo Central School District  
105 South Madison Avenue  
Spring Valley, NY 10977

Dear Ms. Hardwick:

I am responding to your February 10, 2003, letter to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). In your letter, you presented a resolution adopted by the East Ramapo Central School District Board of Education regarding the Indian Point Nuclear Generating Unit Nos. 2 and 3 (Indian Point). This resolution asked the NRC and other regulatory agencies to not certify the emergency evacuation plan for Indian Point.

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure the 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. At the Federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has the lead in offsite (State and local) emergency planning and response for nuclear power plants. The NRC assists FEMA in carrying out this role. The NRC relies on FEMA's findings in determining that there is reasonable assurance that adequate protective measures can and will be taken in the event of a radiological emergency. NRC regulations require that comprehensive emergency plans be prepared and periodically exercised.

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. This responsibility involves direct assessment of onsite emergency planning and preparedness of the facilities that we regulate, in addition to oversight of plant operations and security.

Emergency planning is based upon protection of the public from potential adverse radiological health effects that might occur as a result of an event at a nuclear power plant. The current emergency plans are designed to cope with a spectrum of accidents, from the most insignificant to the most severe, from those with no releases to those with significant releases. Whether the event is the result of a terrorist attack or sudden catastrophic failure of plant equipment, the response would be driven, not by the initiating conditions, but rather by the actions necessary to ensure public health and safety.

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 consistently indicate that the emergency response plans for Indian Point provide a sound framework for effective decision making and implementation of essential emergency preparedness functions.

In the U.S., emergency planning for commercial nuclear power plants specifies two concentric emergency planning zones (EPZs), centered around the plants. The EPZs are the areas for which planning is needed to assure that prompt and effective actions can be taken to protect the public in the unlikely event of an accident. The first zone, called the plume exposure pathway EPZ, is an area of about 10 miles in radius from the center of the plant. The major protective actions planned within this EPZ are evacuation and sheltering in order to protect members of the public from adverse health effects due to inhalation or direct exposure to airborne radioactive material which may be released by the plant during an accident, i.e. the plume. The second zone, called the ingestion pathway EPZ, is an area of about 50 miles in radius from the plant to deal with potential lower-level, long-term risks primarily due to exposure from ingestion of contaminated food and water. Outside of 10 miles, direct exposure is expected to be sufficiently low that evacuation or sheltering should not be necessary.

Exposure to a radioactive plume would not likely result in immediate or serious long-term health effects. Consideration of public sheltering and evacuation in emergency plans is very conservative and recommended at very low dose levels, well below the levels where health effects would be expected to occur. Should an evacuation be recommended, it is not likely that the entire 10-mile EPZ would need to be evacuated, even for a significant release of radioactive material. A radioactive plume does not move in all directions at once, but travels in the direction to which the wind is blowing. Thus, only a small fraction of the population in the EPZ will be in the pathway of the plume and may be recommended for evacuation. In some circumstances, the public may be better protected by sheltering. This type of decision is made by State and local officials in consultation with plant operators and will be communicated to the public through the emergency alert system. The regulations require that information be provided to each household and others within the 10-mile EPZ identifying the sectors that make up the EPZ and the actions to take when notified. Your resolution identified the East Ramapo Central School District as being located in the 50-mile EPZ. Hopefully, this detailed description of the emergency planning associated with the two EPZs is useful to you.

Statements made in your resolution imply reference to a recent report prepared by James Lee Witt Associates, LLC, for the Governor of the State of New York, regarding emergency preparedness at the Indian Point and Millstone facilities. Regarding the Witt report, it, in large measure, addressed matters related to offsite planning and preparedness, which are matters primarily within the purview of FEMA. While any judgment as to the overall state of emergency planning and preparedness is for the NRC to reach, we look initially to FEMA for its views on the report relating to offsite preparedness. We are currently reviewing the report for any insights it may provide to improve emergency preparedness and are prepared to take appropriate action in coordination with FEMA.

The NRC continues to actively monitor the situation and is prepared to take measures to ensure the continued safety of Indian Point and all of our nation's nuclear facilities.

J. Hardwick

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I appreciate your concerns and hope you find this information useful. If you need further assistance, please contact the project manager for the Indian Point units, Mr. Patrick Milano, at (301) 415-1457.

Sincerely,

***/RA/***

Stuart A. Richards, Director  
Project Directorate I  
Division of Licensing Project Management  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

I appreciate your concerns and hope you find this information useful. If you need further assistance, please contact the project manager for the Indian Point units, Mr. Patrick Milano, at (301) 415-1457.

Sincerely,

***/RA/***

Stuart A. Richards, Director  
Project Directorate I  
Division of Licensing Project Management

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