

June 13, 2003

The Honorable William Delahunt
Member, United States
House of Representatives
1250 Hancock Street, Suite 802 N
Quincy, MA 02169

Dear Congressman Delahunt:

This is in response to your letter to Dennis K. Rathbun, dated March 27, 2003, concerning your constituent, Ed Russell, and his March 25, 2003, e-mail expressing concerns about preparation for possible terrorist attacks. Mr. Russell's message was focused on sheltering for his family and posed specific questions pertaining to the type of building, whether basements were appropriate, whether masks were necessary, and whether the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a plan to give radio instructions to those choosing to shelter.

Mr. Russell's concerns appear directly related to what actions he can take as an individual preparing for a potential emergency. General guidance from the DHS is available on this subject on its Web site at www.dhs.gov. There is specific guidance and information related to this subject on the Web site created for this purpose at www.ready.gov. Also, the Web site for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.fema.gov) which is part of DHS, has a specific link called "Citizens' Guide to Preparedness." These government-sponsored websites provide guidance for individuals preparing for a potential emergency, including information on radio and television instructions for sheltering or evacuating the affected area.

Additional information is available at the Red Cross Web site, www.redcross.org. This information was developed specifically for use by individuals, families and business in preparation for an emergency.

NRC regulations require that comprehensive emergency plans be prepared and periodically exercised to assure that actions can and will be taken to notify and protect citizens in the vicinity of a nuclear facility. Provisions must be included in the emergency plans to provide early notification and clear instructions to the populace within the emergency planning zone on how they will be notified and what their initial actions should be in an emergency (e.g., listening to a local broadcast station and remaining indoors). The purpose of these emergency plans is to provide for an adequate response to any radioactive releases from nuclear power plants, regardless of the cause of the release (i.e., accidental or deliberate).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) have both published guidance on protective actions for nuclear incidents. However, those documents are oriented more towards industry, and State, local and Federal government officials. These guides discuss both sheltering and evacuation as well as the background for choosing one of these options. EPA guidance titled "Manual of Protective Action Guides and Protective Actions for Nuclear Incidents" (EPA-400-R-92-001), especially chapters 2 and 5,

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discusses the relative merits of sheltering versus evacuation. This document is be available through EPA's Web site, www.epa.gov. NRC has also issued guidance relevant to Mr. Russell's inquiry. NRC documents related to this subject are available through the NRC's Public Document Room by calling 1-800-397-4209 or e-mail to pdr@nrc.gov.

It is important to note that decisions relating to whether to advise sheltering or order evacuation of an affected area are the responsibility of State and/or local authorities. NRC, DHS, and EPA provide recommendations, in part based on published guidance. However, the final decision on which protective actions are appropriate for any given situation is made by the State and local officials identified in their organizations to do so depending on the conditions relative to the specific emergency. If Mr. Russell wishes information related to the State of Massachusetts and its plans and procedures, he can contact Mr. Richard Swensen, Office of Commonwealth Security, at 617-727-7775.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,

/RA/

William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

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* See previous concurrences

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