

This week the NRC held a roundtable on the status of emergency planning for our nation's nuclear plants. It was apparent that all who sat around this table were concerned about safely keeping the public from harm in the event the unthinkable should become reality. It is important that all communities are prepared in the remote, but possible event of a radioactive release.

Everyone around the NRC's table had put a great deal of time into planning for such an event and it was very unpleasant for them to hear that many doubt the public can be successfully evacuated and that shelter is woefully inadequate. The inadequacy is not for lack of planning, but simply that it was obvious that "chaos" has not seriously been considered, that there could be the loss of vital roadways to evacuate, that an event that resulted in a radioactive release could also damage important infrastructure and that parents will not abandoned their emergency planning positions to assure their children are safe.

Sadly while we sat in a comfortable hotel room discussing possible radioactive tragedies in Maryland, we were also learning of the horrific fears, frustrations and heartbreaking stories ensuing from the damage Hurricane Katrina wreaked on Louisiana and Mississippi this week.

Since September 11, 2001, the nation has increasingly questioned the vulnerability of the nation's nuclear plants. Hurricane Katrina has reminded us that Mother Nature is also a force to be reckoned with when planning for emergencies.

In Louisiana the NRC had the foresight to shutdown the Waterford Nuclear Plant 13 hours in advance of the hurricane. The plant remains offline. However, earthquakes do not afford the utilities such advance warnings.

It was evident during the discussions that neither the NRC nor the utilities believe that nuclear plants can be damaged to the point that there will be a major radioactive release and that an immediate evacuation or sheltering will be necessary for the public. The emphasis was on slow-moving events. Everyone there is planning in earnest and most are providing the tools necessary for emergency planning, but then so did Louisiana and Mississippi.

If radioactivity was released at Diablo Canyon due to a terrorist attack or earthquake, it is highly possible that many of the county's roads would be impassible. Does NRC policy or regulations allow for these simultaneous events? No, they do not. The Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility asked the NRC to reconsider this head-in-the-sand policy.

The nuclear industry believes the "design criteria" of nuclear plants will withstand earthquakes, fire, floods and terrorist attacks. The planners in attendance - utilities, counties and FEMA, all except for New York, consistently said in conversations during breaks they were more concerned with chemical spills, as those facilities are not nearly as robust as nuclear plants. While this may be true, for planning we must imagine the

unimaginable – Sept 11th was a hard lesson to learn and must not be repeated. *Homeland Security* must begin at *home*.

Those who cannot evacuate must be trained and equipped to shelter themselves as effectively as possible. Sheltering has been underplayed in scenarios that address emergencies at U.S. reactors. Yet, sheltering is the most likely scenario in the event of a radioactive release.

The focus of the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility is to assure that the production (and resultant storage) of high-level radioactive waste on our earthquake active coast ends when the current license for Diablo Canyon is termed. However, as one of four panelists from the public sectors I was glad the NRC had invited me to attend and participate at their Roundtable. I was glad to meet the emergency planners and speak to PG&E's emergency planning manager; both were sincere and dedicated to protecting our community. I am certain we all want to believe California is prepared for a radioactive release at Diablo Canyon. Sadly, I left unconvinced.

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