

Continuation of Ex. #6



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

Noon, March 31, 1979

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE HONORABLE JACK WATSON

SUBJECT: Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant Accident

At my request, the top public health officials of the Department, including the Surgeon General, the Director of the Center for Disease Control, the Director of the National Cancer Institute, the Director of the National Institutes of Health, the Commissioner of Food and Drugs, and the Director of the FDA's Bureau of Radiological Health, have reviewed the information available late yesterday afternoon on the accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant in Pennsylvania.

We met late Friday afternoon with the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and his staff as well as with two Commissioners of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and staff from the National Security Council.

We have examined the information the NRC has provided on the status of the reactor and on the amount of radioactivity released from the plant so far. We have also received the results of the first samples of river water and fish collected by the Food and Drug Administration in the vicinity of the plant -- all of which showed no detectable increase in radioactive materials.

Based on this review, the Public Health Service scientists concluded:

- o First, based on the data provided by NRC, the current level of releases of radioactive materials from the plant and of radioactivity around the plant -- while a matter of concern -- would not justify an evacuation, if the reactor were cooling safely and there were no threat of increased releases in the future.

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Second, if, on the other hand, the reactor is not cooling safely, a number of events are possible -- including the possibility of releases of radioactive fission products. The worst case of extensive destruction of the core. The more serious of these events could result in unacceptably high exposures of the population within ten miles of the plant. Unless the NRC can provide assurances that the reactor is cooling safely and that the occurrence of these events can be ruled out, adequate protection of the public health requires -- at a minimum -- that full scale preparations for an evacuation of the population within ten miles of the plant be undertaken on an urgent basis and that the population in that area be officially warned immediately to make all necessary preparations to leave on short notice.

On Friday afternoon, at our meeting here, the NRC could not provide firm assurances that the reactor was cooling safely. It is my understanding that assurances were still not forthcoming early this morning.

I recommend that you seek those assurances from NRC and that, if NRC cannot provide them, you consider recommending to the Governor immediate evacuation; at a minimum, the following actions should be taken, if they have not been taken already. This is particularly important in view of the statements to us of the two NRC Commissioners that notice of a meltdown could be as brief as six hours.

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The population within 20 miles of the plant should be notified publicly and officially to be prepared to evacuate on short notice -- as short as six hours -- and to listen to radio or TV for status reports. The Director of the National Cancer Institute, who is probably the Nation's leading radiation biologist, feels strongly that the warning should extend to people within 20 miles -- even though an evacuation at that distance may prove unnecessary.

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- o Both public (federal and state) and private institutions should immediately take all preparatory action necessary to carry out an evacuation. These preparations should include careful review of the special needs and problems involving (a) hard-to-move individuals such as the handicapped, the sick, and those without care; (b) special institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons, and (c) the critical public health concerns (sanitation, food, emergency shelter, etc.) incident to any large scale evacuation.

- o Your coordinating units should work with H&W on supplying potassium iodide -- a chemical that individuals should ingest as a precautionary health measure in the event substantial amounts of radioactive iodine are released to the environment -- as well as providing instructions to pharmacists and the public on the preparation and use of this material.

Decisions About Interventions

The information that has been made available to us indicates that the interventions being considered to ease the problems with the reactor core carry a significant degree of risk to the population in the surrounding area. It is critical that public health experts from H&W and EPA participate in assessing the seriousness of the public health risks associated with alternative interventions, in deciding which public health risks to take, and in deciding what precautionary steps, including evacuation, are needed to protect the public health when a particular intervention is selected. That is not the case now. I strongly recommend that you make certain NRC closely consults with H&W and EPA public health experts on proposed courses of intervention.

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HEW Activities

We have undertaken a number of activities at HEW which I list below. In two other areas, we are prepared to assist -- but we need to know what you expect us to do.

- o First, we will be prepared to provide either you, the NRC, and/or the Governor's office with our assessment of the public health implications of the environmental monitoring data.
- o Second, we are prepared to provide assistance in the event of an evacuation -- such as infectious disease specialists, and food and drug officials -- to whatever extent you request.

But we need to know what responsibilities you expect us to shoulder so that we can be prepared to respond fully and effectively.

To assist you in your coordinating efforts, I summarize briefly the activities that we have undertaken with respect to the Harrisburg accident:

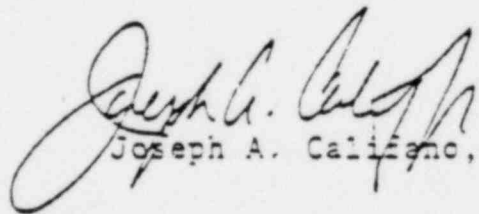
- FDA personnel are in the area and are taking daily samples of water, fish and other food within a ten-mile radius of the plant to detect any radioactive contamination of the food or water supply. The result of these analyses of these samples are being provided to NRC.
- The FDA has identified all food processing plants in the area under its jurisdiction and will sample their raw materials and finished products, as necessary to detect any contamination.
- HEW is providing personnel, on a 24-hour basis, to the NRC's control center to assist in reviewing NRC, EPA, HEW and DCI data from environmental monitoring as well as to provide that data to an HEW panel of public health scientists for review. They

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will make recommendations to me with respect to questions about the public health and safety in the area.

- The PHS has purchased supplies of potassium iodide and is getting these to the area so that they can be made available for the public should radioactive iodine be released into the atmosphere. We are also printing "patient" instructions on use.
- In keeping with our responsibilities under the Interagency Radiological Assistance Plan, we are preparing our resources to assist in the event of any evacuation of the area.
- We will be prepared, if necessary, to provide training to hospital personnel in the area to treat radiation injuries.
- The Center for Disease Control is reviewing the extent to which environmental data are being collected and will make recommendations to me if additional data should be collected to provide an adequate basis for evaluating the near- and long-term public health consequences of exposures resulting from this incident.

I will keep you informed of our activities and of any further recommendations for action we believe necessary to protect the public health.


Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

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