

MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEW

On August 14, 1979, Robert Schamberger and Frederick Herr, NRC/TMI Special Inquiry Group, interviewed Mr. Thomas Blosser, Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. With Mr. Blosser were Ted Wise, Deputy Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness and Larry Zimmerman, Director of Emergency Preparedness for the Borough of Mechanicsburg, a municipality within Cumberland County and within the 20 mile evacuation zone for TMI. The interview took place in the Commissioner's conference room on the second floor of the County Courthouse in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The interview began at about 10:15 a.m. and lasted about 1 hour 45 minutes. The purpose of the interview was to discuss Cumberland County's actions during the accident at TMI and obtain Mr. Blosser's opinions on the adequacy of the response and planning. Messrs. Blosser, Wise and Zimmerman were given copies of the NRC/TMI Special Inquiry Witness Notification prior to the start of the interview.

Prior to the incident at TMI on March 28, 1979, Cumberland County had no plans for any accidents at TMI because no part of Cumberland County is within the five mile planning zone for TMI. The closest county boundary is about 8½-9 miles away from TMI.

Cumberland County was notified of the accident on the morning of March 28, 1979, by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). At the time of the official notification, Blosser and Wise were enroute to a meeting of emergency preparedness directors in Selingsgrove, PA. They were notified of the accident when they arrived at the meeting. Their activities through Wednesday and Thursday consisted primarily of monitoring the situation at TMI.

On Friday, March 30, Cumberland County was first notified of the events occurring at TMI by the news media. Later, formal notification came from PEMA. At about 10:00 a.m. Friday the County was advised to begin planning for a 10 mile evacuation which included Lower Allen Township and New Cumberland Borough in Cumberland County. Later that evening they were advised to begin a 20 mile evacuation plan which included about 100,000 people in the County, including the West Shore area (the western suburbs of Harrisburg). The County was given guidelines by the Commonwealth to contain their evacuation of both 10 and 20 miles within the County to the extent possible.

On Friday, the county got most of their information from the news media. Because of all the conflicting information they were receiving from numerous sources they began full scale planning for a 20 mile evacuation.

For their 20 mile evacuation, the County was short of mass care facilities for about 40-50,000 people. Plans were initiated Saturday and finalized Monday with Franklin County to take the overflow from Cumberland County.

At the local level, the County provided each municipality with a basic plan for their area which the locals customized for their individual needs. The County met with municipal representatives, local officials and emergency personnel on Saturday and provided them with routes of travel, i.e., Rt. 81 West and the Pa. Turnpike West. Municipalities dove-tailed their local traffic planning into these major arteries. The County planned for fire and rescue services and

evacuation of hospitals and nursing homes, even though they were located in the municipalities. This relieved the local officials from planning for these major facilities and allowed the locals to concentrate on moving their other residents.

The planning philosophy of Cumberland County is to depend heavily on the localities. Blosser noted that this philosophy is not shared by other Counties surrounding TMI.

Blosser estimated the 20 mile evacuation plan was in shape to be implemented by Saturday evening and at that time it would have taken about 24 hours to implement. On Sunday, however, the County made commitments to the State to evacuate first within 12 hours and on Sunday evening within 4 hours. Blosser estimated, however, that setting up for the evacuation, e.g., getting national guard support in place, would have required 9 hours. They stated that even though they made the four hour commitment to the State, the evacuation would have required about 12 hours to carry out. Blosser stated that the County had been urged by the State throughout the weekend to reduce the forecasted evacuation times. Evacuation times which would have been required were lowered during the weekend as people voluntarily moved out of the area, but total evacuation times would still have been 4 hours plus set up time of 8-9 hours, or a total of 12-13 hours.

During the weekend, hospitals in the area began reducing their patient census. Holy Spirit Hospital had made arrangements with a hospital in Williamsport to take all Holy Spirit patients. Evacuation of Holy Spirit Hospital could have been completed in 4 hours. Similarly, a nursing home in Cumberland County had

made their own arrangements with a nursing home in Franklin County to take their patients. No Cumberland County resources would have been required for these moves. For other hospitals, the South Mountain Restoration Facility in Franklin County would have been used by Cumberland County for evacuation of its most severe patients. Most hospitals were down to minimum staff because of voluntary evacuations. Staffing was not a problem because of patient census reduction.

Blosser stated that improvements are needed in the mechanism for alerting the public in the event of an emergency. The normal use of sirens for alerting volunteer firemen creates confusion among residents when the same siren is used to signal a natural disaster or nuclear attack. Blosser mentioned the possible use of the NOAA Weather Radio system, which is in effect throughout Pennsylvania, for use in alerting residents. One problem with this system is that there are only about 25,000 radios in the Harrisburgh area equipped to receive NWR signals. Once people are alerted that something is wrong Blosser believes the Emergency Broadcast System is effective.

They noted that one of the major problems in the communications system is at the local level. Initially communications with localities were via telephone, but that became useless on Friday. At that point, the localities used Amateur Radio Operators for communication between localities and the county. Later the DCPA communications system was brought in but it had to be removed later to respond to an incident in Florida. Communications with the state were limited to telephone and teletype.

Blosser noted that on Friday, August 10, 1979, a severe windstorm with 90 mph winds had gone through the west shore area. Cumberland County attempted to contact the PEMA duty officer for 3 hours but were unable to reach him. They cited this as an example of the need to improve the PEMA communications system so that the counties can get in touch with the State during a crisis when the need exists.

In planning the evacuation, the State served primarily a coordination function. The State did not provide a great deal of help in putting together the details of the County plans.

DCPA provided Cumberland County with 4 persons from DCPA's Region II to assist with meetings with localities and emergency personnel and in planning the evacuation.

The biggest problem Zimmerman had at the local level was communication. On Friday when he could not get through to the County because the telephones were overloaded, he had to proceed on his own, without County guidance, in setting up an evacuation plan. He noted that without good communications local municipalities are totally without the means to get assistance in pulling together their plans.