

Comments of the San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace on the NRC meeting on Emergency Preparedness on August 31 and September 1, 2005

Last week was a very strange time to be sitting in a room listening to experts on emergency preparedness tell us how prepared they are to respond to an emergency, while at the same time we were watching the complete and utter failure of FEMA to respond to Hurricane Katrina. We are seeing images and hearing stories of suffering that no one ever imagined would be allowed to happen in the United States. We may never fully know how many lives were lost because of the dangerously slow response of FEMA to the disaster caused by the hurricane. What we do know is that there were steps that could have been taken in advance to mitigate this tragedy. Experts have been warning for years that the levies needed to be upgraded and the wetlands restored to protect New Orleans from just the kind of disaster that we are seeing now. Clearly, in this case, as in the case of protection of the public from potential nuclear disaster, cost savings are put ahead of human life. We were told in the meeting that the distribution of potassium iodide in reactor communities is not "cost effective". This is just one more example of putting cost savings before health and safety. I hope we don't look back at nuclear power plant safety one day after an accident and see all of the things that could have been done to protect the public that were not done because someone thought they were not cost effective.

We heard from many local emergency planners about how prepared they are for a nuclear emergency. I hope they are correct. It was disturbing that many of them did not seem to acknowledge all of the very diverse geographic locations and population densities at each nuclear power plant site. In San Luis Obispo County, we have very limited options if we were ever to need to evacuate. I just received my water bill. Inside is a flyer that I enclosed. It is advertising a training class for individuals because the emergency planners here acknowledge that in a large scale disaster the first responders will not be able to get to people for at least 72 hours so we had better be able to take care of ourselves.

I was surprised to hear the representative from PG&E, Mark Lemke, express his concerns about the staff at Diablo Canyon having time to take care of all of their responsibilities in the event of an emergency. If he is concerned about staffing levels, then we are very concerned and would like to be reassured that Diablo Canyon has adequate fully trained staff on site at all times.

As a group, the SLO Mothers for Peace was disappointed in the make up of the panel. We were not offered a chance to participate in the panel, nor was anyone from Indian Point or Public Citizen. I was surprised to see that David Lochbaum and Paul Gunter from NIRS were forced to share a seat and participate only half time. The panel and the discussion were heavily weighted toward the industry and the local planners.

The Mothers for Peace strongly supports the proposal by Eric Epstein of TMI Alert to create an ongoing advisory panel on emergency planning made up of representatives of advocacy groups, industry representatives and local planners. A day and a half of discussion is a start, but this is much too large an issue to address in such a short time. We encourage you to form such an advisory group that would meet regularly, both regionally and nationally. We need to take the lessons that we are learning from the tragedy in the Southeast and ensure that we are making serious and realistic emergency plans for the citizens living around nuclear power plants across the country.