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NRC HISTORIAN WRITES PERSPECTIVE ON THREE MILE ISLAND INCIDENT, 25 YEARS LATER

J. Samuel Walker, historian for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), has written the fourth volume of the agency's history, Three Mile Island: A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective .

The book, published by the University of California Press, is expected to be available in bookstores in time for the 25th anniversary of the Three Mile Island accident on March 28, 2004. It is available now for advance purchase at <http://www.amazon.com> and <http://www.barnesandnoble.com> .

The book considers the issues surrounding nuclear power in the 1970s as a prelude to focusing on the days when the event unfolded, March 28 - April 1, 1979. During that time, a combination of equipment failures and operator error led to a partial melting of the fuel in Unit 2 of the Three Mile Island complex. Of particular interest are sections covering the evacuation recommendation for pregnant women and preschool-age children, as well as concerns over a buildup of hydrogen in the damaged reactor.

This was the most serious accident in the history of commercial nuclear power in the United States. Walker also covers both the immediate aftermath of the accident and the investigations into possible long-term effects.

"[Three Mile Island's] results suggested that nuclear proponents had underestimated the risks of a major accident at a nuclear plant in the United States," Walker writes, "and nuclear critics had overstated the likely consequences." The accident prompted wide-ranging reforms that increased safety at U.S. nuclear plants, but TMI also significantly eroded public confidence in plants' abilities to operate safely, Walker concludes.

Other volumes on the history of the NRC, also written by Walker, include Controlling the Atom, Containing the Atom, and Permissible Dose .

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