



NUCLEAR

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everything that happens outside the fence line," Sheehan continued. "So state, local and county communities would make a decision as far as whether there would have to be evacuations, whether potassium iodine tablets should be taken, whether members of the public should shelter in place."

And FEMA handles most emergency planning as well, assessing how state and local agencies and institutions would deal with a potential disaster related to the nuclear plant.

That includes a graded emergency exercise once every two years. It's not practical to simulate an actual regional evacuation, but FEMA monitors local departments and facilities to make sure they're ready to go if needed.

Critic seeks public hearing on plant safety and evacuation plans

By Bryan McGonigle

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As Rowley nuclear safety activist Steve Comley Sr. makes the rounds to various communities

urging for a letter to request a public hearing on Seabrook, N.H., Nuclear Power Plant and the facility's evacuation plan, a spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission says that agency would be OK with such a hearing because it feels adequate evacuation plans are already set.

"It's required under federal law - not only do they have an

"FEMA will go in, let's say to a school, and say, 'Show us how you'd evacuate your students,'" Sheehan said. "They may load them on buses and take them to an evacuation center outside the 10-mile emergency planning zone. FEMA will also go to hospitals and say, 'Show us how you would decontaminate plant workers who need it, or members of the public, in the case of a radiological emergency.' There aren't actual evacuations during these drills, but nevertheless they try and simulate some of the effects of evacuation to the greatest

And, of course, communities change and grow. So FEMA's effort with state and local agencies is continual to reflect new schools, new business districts, new roads, etc.

"They have to alter these plans on a continuous basis to reflect the new realities," Sheehan said. "And as part of that, one of the things that we require the plant owners to do is that every time new census data comes out, once every 10 years, we require them to update their evacuation time estimates. And so they have to do a study to show that if there was an

NRC defends Seabrook plan

emergency plan, but it's one that's tested on a regular basis," said Neil Sheehan of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's public affairs office.

The NRC is in charge of on-site emergency response. If there was an accident at the facility, the NRC would be responsible for making sure the plant was dealing

with the emergency, and the NRC would communicate with offsite first responders about the status of the incident.

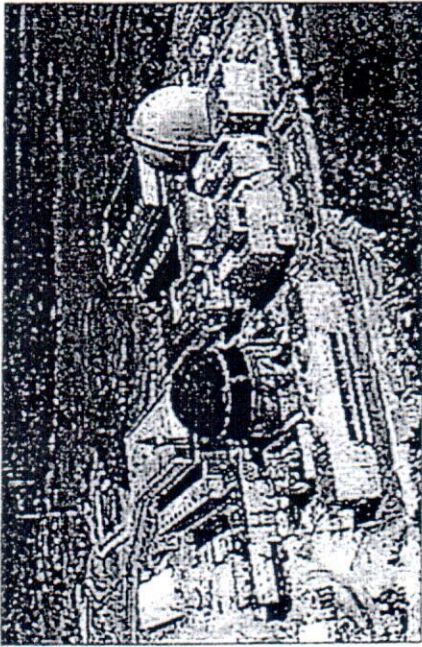
Outside of that, the Federal Emergency Management Agency steps in.

"FEMA is responsible for

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Seabrook, N.H., Nuclear Power Plant. [FILE PHOTO]

it would take to get people out of various parts of the emergency planning zone and to safer locations."

So outside the actual nuclear plants, the NRC relies on FEMA for emergency planning. If FEMA goes back to the NRC and says they do not have "reasonable assurance" that evacuation plans would work in any given area, new plans would have to be drafted within a certain amount of time.

"That has happened very rarely since nuclear power plants began operating in the U.S., but nevertheless there is mechanism in place that if there were ever concerns raised about the efficacy of the emergency plans that they would be addressed through that means," Sheehan said.

Sheehan added that he doesn't know why Comley is on a mission to close the plant for safety reasons.

"Over the years, we've had ongoing communications with Mr. Comley, as recently

how these processes work and why we continue to have updates from FEMA that the plans would work. He disagrees with that. And we've tried to ask for specifics and will continue to do that.

"The reality on the ground for us is that FEMA says the plans will work and they're basing that on their interactions with the states [Massachusetts and New Hampshire] and counties based on their observations with these emergency exercises," Sheehan continued. "If he brings any new information to our attention, we'll share it with our federal and state partners. But at this point, we have not seen anything that would lead us to believe that the plans cannot be effective."

Comley said he's not satisfied with any reassurances from FEMA or the NRC.

"If the [FEMA] responses that have occurred in Florida and Puerto Rico are any indication of whether they're going to protect our safety, we're in a lot of trouble."

no faith in the NRC, because all they do is rubber-stamp the wishes of the industry, and I think FEMA does the same thing."

Comley, who founded the nonprofit We The People to crusade against the nuclear facility, added that he is in talks with Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey's office to get going on a public hearing regarding emergency preparedness around the plant.

Comley and We The People recently erected a massive billboard sign on Route 1 in Salisbury warning President Donald Trump that the plant was not prepared for an emergency. He said he plans to keep the sign up - at a cost of \$700 a month - until the Seabrook plant is closed.

"All the NRC is doing right now is passing the buck, because they're worried about our momentum that we have," Comley said. "Because when we're able to shut down Seabrook - because it's in the wrong location and everybody knows it - it's going to have a rumbling effect across the United States, in every plant."

Comley has also been visiting local selectmen boards and city councils within 10 miles of the plant (and some just outside the 10-mile radius) - including Georgetown, Newburyport, Salisbury and Ipswich, among others - having them sign on to his letter demanding a public hearing on plant safety and evacuation plans.