

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

ATOMIC SAFETY AND LICENSING BOARD  
Before Administrative Judges  
Louis J. Carter, Chair  
Frederick J. Shon  
Dr. Oscar H. Paris

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In the Matter of: : Docket Nos.  
  
CONSOLIDATED EDISON COMPANY OF NEW YORK : 50-247 SP  
Inc. (Indian Point, Unit No. 2), : 50-286 SP  
:  
POWER AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
(Indian Point, Unit No. 3) : July 23, 1982  
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Testimony Submitted on Behalf of  
"New York City Council" Intervenors

By

NICHOLAS FREUDENBERG

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Testimony on the Adequacy of New York City's Ability to  
Evacuate Population Rapidly

On August 7, 1980, a propane gas truck developed a leak while crossing the George Washington Bridge. Since the explosion of a propane gas truck can create an explosive fireball an eighth of a mile in diameter, it was imperative to evacuate a considerable portion of the population rapidly. Approximately 2,000 people were evacuated from several apartment buildings on 178th Street between Fort Washington and Haven Avenues.

However, the process of evacuation revealed some of the problems of moving people quickly in a heterogeneous, densely populated area. Some of the problems were:

1. Poor coordination between the police and fire departments. The two agencies had clearly not practiced evacuation plans and had no organized plan.
2. Failure to take populations special needs into account. Among the residents of that neighborhood are people who speak only Spanish, Greek, Russian or other languages. Officials were unable to communicate with these people, leading to confusion and delayed response. A high proportion of elderly in the neighborhood, as well as some handicapped people, means that many have difficulty moving. There were no special plans to help these people to evacuate.
3. Police and firefighters lack training in dealing with such emergencies. People were evacuated to street corners which would clearly have been dangerous had there been an explosion.
4. Lack of protocols for dealing with special situations. Many people returned from shopping or other errands to find their building evacuated. Often these people would not know whether a child or older person who had stayed at home had already left or was still inside, afraid to open the door. Several people in this situation were hysterical with fear.

In sum, the propane gas truck incident in Washington Heights demonstrated that New York City does not have the ability to remove several thousand people from one limited neighborhood.

Submitted by:

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July 15, 1982