

Intervenor Observer

Nathaniel Mills

Observation Post

Fire Control Center  
Valhalla, New York

Time of Observation

7:30 am to 2:30 pm

The following is my summarization and evaluation of the experiences of the Fire Control Center as a directing and monitoring post for the County's network of civilian emergency support services — all the fire departments, ambulance and rescue crews — while handling a day of simulated crisis at Indian Point, less than 18 miles away. Within the same center, the simulation of a Decontamination Center was observable in part and therefore I append some comments on that process and its surprisingly inappropriate interaction with Control Center operations.

#### THINNESS of RESOURCES

The major impression that surfaced throughout the day was the thinness of the resources being called upon for the tasks expected. This was overtly evidenced on several occasions by the reaction of the local resource to the simulated directive it was being given. The most uninhibited response was the off-handed rejoinder by one town's fire dispatcher at 1:06 p.m. : "I wouldn't be here anyway"!

At about 12:30 p.m., Mohegan's Rescue Team had a serious automobile accident on the Taconic Parkway to attend to, so their response to an evacuation directive at 12:38 p.m. became: "Call us back at 2 p.m.". It seemed that this order was intended 'for real' to test the movement of 2 elderly immobile persons from each of 2 nursing homes, but confronted with this 'conflict of duties', this special test was aborted back to the same make-believe as all else.

Within the fire departments at each level, the same kind of coincidences revealed the woeful inadequacies of resources for any evacuation crisis. The Control Center itself sent 2 of its experienced staff (clairvoyantly, in advance) to help man the E.O.C. The Verplanck fire ladders simply let a brush fire behind a local factory burn itself out because they were busy with simulated duties around 11:10 a.m.

The most extreme disparity between simulation and reality opened up when an attempt was simulated to direct 15 ambulances from as far away as Brooklyn to proceed to the VA Hospital in Montrose to evacuate 62 (!) stretcher cases to places such as the Bronx. This of necessity ran into all kinds of non-simulated reluctance and disbelief.

All this contacting required struggling with the ordinary public dial lines since the order for the day was to limit the use of all emergency lines to traffic with the E.O.C. Thus, in the normal life of that otherwise ordinary Wednesday, several phones were not being

answered, or were out of order — an inadvertent simulation of normality perhaps, but quite significant nonetheless.

### CASUALNESS of the EFFORT

The other overall impression that struck this observer (who lives 1 1/4 miles from the Point) was the inappropriateness of an all-pervading casualness at this Center throughout the day. By comparison, a fire drill in just one small school would be followed through with extreme care by all concerned and the goal would have been to inculcate an almost instinctive response to any emergency. Most of this casualness did seem to be an adjustment to the actual meaninglessness and inconsequence of the effort, some to apparently 'laid-back' everyday style, but much of it reflected the tools and style of the process itself — that is, ordinary dial phones, only verbal messages down the chain, and imprecise knowledge of the area being dealt with.

The Control Center's dispatchers were off-handedly informed of the E.O.C.'s phone number at 8:45 a.m. that day and at 9:15 a.m. they were given the new Indian Point information number. Similarly the pace of the alerting of the affected towns and cities fell almost an hour behind the actual time of the Governor's declaration of each emergency level:

	<u>Gov's declarat.</u>	<u>Notific. of towns</u>
Site Emergency:	11:35 a.m.	11:58 a.m. to 12:14 p.m.
General Emergency:	11:54 a.m.	1:04 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Many overheard comments reflect this casualness clearly. "Is Millwood there someplace?" "Did I get hold of Yorktown? I guess I'll do it again to make sure" At 10:20 a.m.: "Is it a site emergency yet?" At 11:34 a.m.: "Sounds like everything's screwed up". At 1:02 p.m. to 'Scotty': "What zones are within the evacuation area?" With need to send an ambulance to Holmes: "Wonder where that is, the ambulance will have to figure that out". When no one researched the matter, this observer was able fill the gap with a regular road map in his possession.

### A LESS THAN TOLERABLE LEVEL of EQUIPMENT FAILURE

The third aspect that needs to be spotlighted about this locations experiences was that several pieces of vital equipment turned up mal- or non-functioning. At the start of the day a repair call had to be placed to Motorola about the lack of volume from the radio. At 12:20 p.m. some questions arose about the functioning of the "Channel 3 switch", and a few minutes later it was decided to call in the phone company to solve the inability to reach the E.O.C. on the hot line.

The worse spot for communication trouble turned out to be Peekskill where the Fire Department had a dead radio all day and the phone calls to them had to be routed through some other switchboard; as one outburst had it — "I had to go through about 10 guys to get the responsible person", this at 11:58 a.m. These situations existed without having any special stress or inexperienced bungling, as might be injected by a real crisis or just by off-hour conditions.

### The DECONTAMINATION SIMULATION

If nothing else, this run through of the decontamination process demonstrated that the effects of an actual nuclear release on March 9th could not have been properly handled. Vital protective equipment

for the staff (boots, masks, hoods) was not available. Of the 4 Geiger counters brought to the site, only 2 could be made to work. The arrival of the 3 trial 'victims' was much delayed because they apparently could not find the place.

The doctor in charge, Dr. Domenick K. Galluzzo, explained that at best only 4 or so victims per hour could be properly handled at that cramped location and with a staff of only 6 in all. Then the doctor's and the assisting County policeman's efforts to communicate with the E.O.C. led into a string of problems: first, the pay phone in the lounge (used as the screening area) couldn't handle it. So next, both men, in their "contaminated" garb, entered the Control Center to place their calls, but the hot line still wasn't up to it, and they finally got through via the ordinary dial line on the console. Let's hope there is no early need for actual decontamination of real victims.

Submitted by

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