

My name is Barbara K. Hickernell. I reside at 12 Terrich Court, Ossining, New York. I observed the March 9, 1983 Indian Point Drill activities at the Ossining Municipal Building. I arrived at 7:40 AM and at 8:00 AM, Lt. Joseph Burton, who was reported to duty, ushered me into the police communications room, offering me a choice of seats from which to observe Ossining's participation in the Drill. Upon his arrival, Ossining Village Police Chief, Ronald Goldfarb, offered me coffee. At 8:10 AM, a reporter (Ed Traglever) from the Gannett papers arrived, stating that the only Drill news his office knew up by that time was a mock personnel accident - a worker with a broken leg was taken by the Verplanck Ambulance to Northern Westchester Medical Center in Mount Kisco. (We wondered aloud why that hospital was chosen and not one of the closer ones - Phelps in North Tarrytown or Community in Peekskill - which are easier to reach via main roads.)

At 8:25, an announcement (with lots of static) was heard: "Emergency Drill underway at Indian Point" / "An alert situation exists - notify elected officials on the alert status on emergency plans." Because of the static and poor reception, an Ossining police officer requested the officer at the radio to "call him back, tell him to speak a little clearer."

Within 5 minutes the Ossining town officials were notified.

During this time there was a conversation about the safety of the Indian Point plants with one officer stating that Indian Point I ran for 23 years with no problems and questioning if the new ones were less safe.

At 8:40 Police Chief Goldfarb came by and told Ed and me that his only duties right then were to be sure that the local officials were notified - and that he had done this.

Shortly after this, an unidentified village employee came in, was briefed, and commented "What am I supposed to do?" Another unidentified one answered "We all stay here and fry while the others get away."

At about 8:45 AM, Town of Ossining Supervisor Wishnie came in, was briefed, and then asked "What's the scenerio?" He was told "There is none so far."

At about 9:09 an announcement came on the radio: "Stand by for a message." The message was: "This is a drill. The County Executive ordered all schools closed in the 10 mile area and the children sent home as of 8:58." At 9:12 the Mayor of Ossining was called. The conversation was "The reason I called you is that we are in the middle of a drill. ... This is a drill."

Right after that the Chief said to call all cars in. A radio announcement said "All cars 10-6." He then said to find out if there is a special number we should call.

The next phase began at about 9:19 when we were invited to move to another room where Lt. Burton gave out radiation dosimeters to two officers who immediately left with them. He passed out to the remaining officers preprinted 3x5 card forms for the officers to record their radiation readings. (A card is attached.) His instructions were "Dosimeter readings should be taken every hour on the hour, record them. Wear the unit on the outside of the jacket."

I noted that the batteries were purchased fresh for the occasion, coming from sealed containers all in a paper bag, that there were problems in placing some of the batteries in the units, and that one officer put his dosimeter on the inside of his jacket pocket.

Lt. Burton explained that the dosimeters were the same kind as X-ray technicians wear and they will be taken back and sent away for readings. Lt. Burton also passed out what appeared to be circular radiation badges and KI tablets (14 tablets per each sealed bottle) to each officer. The latter were to be left in their pockets and taken only under direct orders from the Westchester County Health Commissioner. He told them to stay in radio contact.

One officer commented that the KI tablets expired in June 1981.

There were also three geiger counters in the box of equipment for the Drill and Lt. Burton said that "we don't know how to work them." He also commented that the following communities are on the same radio frequency: Croton, Ossining, Briarcliff Manor, and North Tarrytown.

We returned to the main communications room.

At 9:45 the sirens were activated. Since I was sitting next to an open window, the siren was clearly audible in the background. About 24 calls questioning the sirens were received by the police who responded "This is just a test."

An automatic Emergency Broadcast System message came on over the radio in an adjoining room and we were brought in to listen to it.

At 9:50 the "situation escalated." There was a conversation between the police and town officials in which one told the other (not sure who told whom) that they were not notified that the sirens were going off before they actually did. (Later Mr. Wishnie told me that they did get a call stating that the sirens were going off but there was no notification of the escalation of the situation.)

At 9:53, the police and town officials were looking through their Emergency Management Response books and after reading some portions said "we now wait for instructions."

A tow truck company was notified (mock) so that a Route 9A breakdown (in particular) could be cleared. Mr. Wishnie said this was particularly important since 9A will be tied up by construction for the next few months.

Someone came in and asked if certain radios were in place and was told that these radios were delivered by the County Police the previous evening. The previous Thursday or Friday, we were told, the KI, dosimeters, and TLDs were delivered.

At 10:27 the Walkie Talkies were used. The Town of Ossining police were contacted.

At 10:35 the police couldn't reach the County EOC by walkie talkie. Mr. Wishnie then proceeded to call them to find out what was happening since there had been no communication from them lately. He spoke with an Officer Gross who said "We're in the EOC and don't know what's going on." Mr. Wishnie was told there was a site emergency and the plume was going north at this point. After this call, Chief Goldfarb commented "We had a lot more information last year and still that wasn't enough."

Chief Goldfarb explained that they had three ways to communicate: two way radio, hot line, and telephone. He commented that it was too bad something wasn't going on so that they could see how useful those radios are going to be.

At 10:55 I left leaving Rick Gendron to observe.

Overall I was impressed by the dedication of the local officials to test out equipment which would be needed in an actual radiological emergency, and was even more impressed by the concern Chief Goldfarb and Town Supervisor Wishnie showed when they hadn't had any communication from the EOC and then took the time to call to see what was happening. Since they were told that the mock plume was going N, one would assume that people would evacuate either east or south, the latter coming right through Ossining's main roads (9 and 9A). 9A, however, was experiencing a three mile backup that morning because the State Department of Transportation was cutting trees in preparation for road construction. I would hope that there would be better communication to our police and town officials in an actual emergency and that protective gear be issued to the police and other town employees who might have to be outside while the population is either sheltering or evacuating. The morning's observation brought it home even more clearly to me that the drill was one on paper only, that it was not testing the emotional responses of the emergency workers in a real situation.



Ms. Plage's notes recorded that at 12:15 a call came to the Ossining police from the county police asking them to cover Croton Point, when actually they were supposed to ask them to cover the intersection of Routes 9 and 9A. Chief Goldfarb called the county back to ask them to verify this. At 12:50 a call came back from the county police to switch the orders, i.e., Ossining police to 9/9A and county police to Croton Point. Ms. Plage wrote in her notebook that "confusion ensued as to who was supposed to be where." At 1 PM Chief Goldfarb ordered resumption of Croton Point observation. The county car was to go up to Montrose exit on Route 9. She pointed out that a countywide radio-frequency would avoid such confusion, according to Chief Goldfarb. From 12:45 to 1:30, no events or information relating to the exercise occurred.

Ms. Sanchez's notes quote an unidentified local official saying that there is "still room for improvement between the local people and municipalities. More funds are needed. More activity between the county and state level. Locally, we had less to do than last year. Attitudes can be affected if further drills take place. The State legislature should provide more funds for each participating group. All information has been coming in one half hour late." She commented that "everyone admits that they are not set up for the situation." Again, the observation is made that nothing has happened relating to the drill since the last communication at 12:05.

Ms. Indusi began observing at 2:45. At 3:00, Ms. Indusi noted again that nothing had been heard since 12:05. At 3:40, Ms. Indusi reported a comment by the police officer, "I don't know. We haven't heard anything since a little after noon." At 4:08, Chief Goldfarb announced, "I just talked to Nordella. He said by 4:30 it'll be all over." At 4:33 Patrolman DiLoreto said, "Now it won't be over until 5:00." At 4:50 a call came through, "Police involvement in the Indian Point drill is no longer needed," and calls were made to notify others of the announcement. Ms. Indusi's notes reflect that Town Supervisor Wishnie commented, "Communications are late, coming in approximately 45 minutes after the happening."