

Statement of Christine Northrup, RN, on the Westchester County Nuclear Disaster Planning Training given in November, 1982 at Westchester County Medical Center

My agency, a local health care facility, requested that I attend the November, 1982 training session at the Westchester County Medical Center because of a working relationship which we share with the County. I, in fact, volunteered to attend the session with the understanding that I would receive further information about what was expected of me in a nuclear emergency. It was never made clear to me by Westchester County that what I had actually volunteered for was the donation of my own time, not necessarily just working hours, to be 'on call' for a 'nuclear disaster'. This ambiguity was not peculiar to my individual situation, that is, not being a Westchester County employee. It came to my attention that at least some of those Westchester County employees who recognized the unsaid implications of the session and voiced protest, were subtly coerced into becoming involuntary volunteers.

It is worthy to note that, although my name had been submitted to Westchester County well before the November training session, my name was not on the original roster contained in the memo I received concerning the session--just two days before the session. Despite the fact that I signed in on the required attendance list at the November session, I subsequently received another notice to attend an identical training session in February. This obvious lack of organization for the training sessions was made even more obvious when it took no less than four working days to clear up the 'mystery' of whether or not it was necessary for me to attend the second session.

As noted above, the initial dissemination of information for the training session was poor, a foretaste of what was to come at the actual session. During the session, a two inch thick manual, which would have taken four days to read

and make sense of, was distributed with no explanation as to its purpose, proposed use, or significance. More careful reading subsequently revealed that it contained inconsistent information, unexplained diagrams, and no references or footnotes. The only reference in the manual was one identifying the Beir Study, yet it contained no further information as to where, why, how, or when this study was conducted or published.

During the four hour session, the leader failed to identify the sponsoring agency and, in passing, admitted that equipment available (particularly geiger counters) was hopelessly inadequate. There were perhaps 50-60 people in the room, which made it virtually impossible for everyone to ask questions of the trainers and receive feedback. Because the session was merely four hours long, far too brief to cover all the necessary information, many questions remained unanswered. A follow-up session was promised, however, to my knowledge, it never materialized. (Hence, my confusion about the second session which I was notified about as mentioned above. The second session which I was aware of was not a follow-up session, but an identical session to the first, designed for a new set of volunteers.)

My discussions with County employees following the session revealed that the registered nurses I spoke with, who might be responsible for decontamination procedures in an emergency, remained confused about their potential role. Despite the training session, they were confused as to the principles of radiological contamination/decontamination. Most of them had extremely limited knowledge about nuclear energy, how a disaster could occur, and how radiation would be detected. Adequate information was not given by Westchester County to facilitate

the assimilation of the material covered at this training session.

In general, the session lacked the integrity of true training; the majority of the time was spent on the operation of a geiger counter. No specific techniques for wash down were offered; no satisfactory answer concerning the disposal of contaminated water used in washing victims of radiological exposure was provided. Furthermore, it was implied by the trainer that contaminated civilians could not be forcibly detained, nor could their contaminated possessions be confiscated.

In total, this experience left me wondering if, rather than an educational session intended to provide for the protection of the community welfare, this session was merely planned to accomodate some mandate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Northrup, RN  
RD #3, Rochambla Rd.  
Peekskill, NY 10566