

Observer Mary Miller Larkin  
Observation Post Verplanck Fire Station  
Joint Media Center  
Verplanck, New York  
Time of Observation 9:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

General Observations at Media Center

There was obvious effort to simulate a major LOCA in all of its details as it progressed, from the declaration of an alert due to explosion, to site emergency, to county emergency, to general emergency. The LOCA was caused by an explosion in the containment building which caused two valves in the coolant mechanism to open.

There were many high-level New York State and Westchester County personnel in evidence, as well as leading representatives from both utilities. A huge room had been totally pre-empted for the dramatization and announcement of the progress of the emergency. Phone banks lined three walls for use by reporters. Television and radio crews abounded. All was quiet as personnel awaited each new development. In a separate room were at least 20 television monitors following the developments. Another room had a varied assortment of breakfast beverages, rolls, donuts, etc., served to all, including citizen observers.

Specific Observations at Media Center

8:15 All children sent home from schools.

9:00 It was learned by this citizen observer shortly after her arrival that the children had been sent home from school at 8:15. There was a statement from observers in the Media Center that several EPZ districts need three times their bus fleets to transport all the children home. Someone in the room asked Westchester County representative, Claire Palermo whether additional buses had been brought from lower Westchester. Ms. Palermo answered affirmatively that that would be the situation.

The wind was reported as northerly and was expected to shift to NNW at 9 mph. An observer questioned whether there had been any provisions for those people located 11 and 12 miles downwind of the site. Ms. Palermo responded that no EBS announcement had been made for such an area, but that "it was presumed that those people would know about it."

9:45 Ms. Palermo announced that the utility sirens had been activated and were now alerting persons within the 10 mile zone. Although the room was quiet, we could not hear the sirens; a utility employee went and opened a door so that they became audible. None of those present at the Media Center would have known to turn on their radios for announcements unless Ms. Palermo had announced the sounding of the sirens at the microphone.

- 9:45 It was announced that the EBS message indicated that there was no danger to the public. It was added that this would be a good time for residents of Rockland and Orange Counties to get out their evacuation brochures!
- 10:37 Despite the previous announcement that there was no danger to the public, a county emergency was declared at this time. Ms. Palermo announced that it had been requested on the EBS message that all unnecessary telephone calls should be ceased immediately. A reporter asked Ms. Palermo if the County really believed that people would refrain from using the telephones; she responded that they "hoped people would cooperate."
- 11:50 General emergency is declared.

Summary of Observations at Media Center

What was seen as frustrating by this observer was the expenditure of tremendous amounts of money, as well as the valuable energy and time of talented professionals, on something that was simulated in words only. In Tokyo, the whole city drills for earthquakes--in actuality, every person physically moves to practice evacuating. While energy was invested, there seemed to be a total lack of the investment of belief that such an event could really happen, and that we'd better have an idea of how to respond physically. It was reminiscent of the Emperor's New Clothes. No one wanted to say, "This is an empty, verbal simulation, not a physical drill."