

COMMENTS ON EVACUATION OBSERVATION BY JERRY ROBOCK
YORKTOWN POLICE HEADQUARTERS, YORKTOWN HEIGHTS, NY. MARCH 9, 1983

I spent two and a half hours in the front lobby of the Yorktown Police Headquarters standing by the front desk window observing the activity and reactions of the police and other persons in relation to the evacuation drill. I found the police very cooperative and concerned about their responsibilities regarding a possible accident at Indian Point.

The over-all feeling of the police personnel involved was that they were not given adequate training to deal with a real emergency and that they would be unprepared to cope with a real evacuation. They felt uncertain of the terminology used, of the sequence of events and of their specific responsibilities regarding an evacuation.

Many comments were made that if a real emergency occurred they would be unsure that many municipal workers won't simply flee themselves rather than expose themselves to the possible radiation contamination. The municipal workers called to represent the Parks, Sanitation and Highway departments were instructed in their expected responsibilities but they joked and questioned what they would or could really do. The Parks worker was to go through the parks and clear people out. The Highway worker was to help the police set up and man barricades.

Throughout the day the Sergeants responsible for directing local participation were only able to respond to the events as they were directed by the Hawthorne command center. They were unable to plan for expected events because they didn't have sufficient information on possible contingencies plans. There were many attempts to anticipate circumstances that might occur, such as requests for weather information that went unanswered, but lacking clear information they simply waited for direction.

As it turned out, there was an accident on the Taconic State Parkway that required an ambulance and the other vehicle in Yorktown was also in use during the drill. If there was a need to evacuate non-ambulatory people within their jurisdiction, they would have had to rely on surrounding ambulance services.

Evidently the Yorktown police are responsible for dispatching the Somers fire department during the day. Repeated calls to them in response to the drill went unanswered. They were never reached during the time I was observing, although they were directed by Hawthorne to instruct them to participate and have barricades available.

My feeling from the police personnel was that there was no simple way, even in the best possible case, to evacuate the 10 mile evacuation zone, that there would be no way to keep order in the event of an evacuation, that their personnel were untrained, and that those currently directing the evacuation drill were also unprepared.

Observations of Jerry Robock on Wednesday, March 9, 1983
Yorktown Police Station, Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

10:20 Arrived in lobby of police station. Met Hal Poritsky, previous observer. Informed of events in progress.

10:25 Highway worker enters. Sgt. Arruda gave worker a kit with a docimeter and thyroid pills and instructed the worker how the docimeter worked, what it was, and how to read it. Sgt. Arruda also explained what the thyroid pills were suppose to do and instructed the worker not to take the pills unless instructed by the Health department. The worker was told to return the kit after the drill.

Sgt Arruda told the worker that if this was a real emergency he would be asked to meet a policeman at a designated location and bring barricades. His responsibility would be to prevent people from entering the evacuation zone and assist people in leaving the zone. He was told to remain in his truck after setting up the barricades and that if he had to leave the truck he should wear protective clothing. He chuckled and said he hadn't been given any.

10:29 Highway worker left.

10:32 Sgt. Massi responded to a call on the emergency radio system from the Hawthorne command center to report on traffic and congestion on the entire length of Route 202.

10:45 Two other city workers (one from the parks dept. and the other from the sanitation dept.) enter with the previous highway worker and hang out in lobby.

10:45 Desk officer asked to monitor Emergency Broadcast System. Officer turned on radio set on WABC who stated that the volume control was set at too loud a position. Sgt Massi replied that "we'll have to make some arrangements to fix this". The radio was turned off.

10:48 Highway worker was interviewed by reporter from North County News. Worker stated that "Con Ed should provide everyone with radiation suits. It would be cheaper..." than evacuating. "Look at (Route) 202 at 5:00!". (Laugh)

10:50 Request over local police radio for a check back on the road conditions. No response yet.

10:51 Town Supervisor Nancy Elliot enter evacuation center, a small room two rooms behind the front desk. Sgt. Massi reports to her that no manpower had been deployed at that point.

10:54 Reporter from WVIP radio station interviews Sgt Massi for a statement. Sgt Massi replied that things were progressing nicely and that they were participating in the drill. He said that the event at Indian Point had been upgraded to an on-site emergency. He stated that if this was a real accident it would be difficult to determine what they would be able to do. Sgt Massi mentioned that due to the bus strike it was questionable about evacuating people. He stated that "nobody knows what the real thing would be like" and suggested calling a snow emergency.

10:56 A second request was made from Hawthorne to check traffic. Yorktown reported no problems.

Yorktown was reminded by Hawthorne that at 10:51 the on-site emergency was upgraded to stage 3. They were told that the county was simulating specific points to deploy police personnel to. Yorktown was not being asked to deploy any personnel at this time. Yorktown was informed that there would be two point in Yorktown where police would be deployed.

10:59 Test of hot line radio.

11:00 Yorktown informed that they were not being received well on the radio test.

11:01 Yorktown asked by Hawthorn command to check the general status. Sgt Arruda commented that "now it should get worse."

11:03 Sgts Arruda and Massi discussing notification of emergency status with Nancy Elliot. Statement that "they've got it backwards" in reference to sequence of stage 2 and stage 3 events as to which stage an on-site emergency was.

11:08 Radio check with command center. Communication now "loud and clear".

11:08 Municipal workers told they would not be needed and that they should resume their normal duties. After returning their emergency kits they left.

11:17 Sgt Massi commented to Sgt Arruda that they had received no training for an evacuation, that they'd only been trained about what radiation is.

11:22 Peekskill police called for a radio check. They were received "loud and clear".

11:24 Both sargents are discussing with Nancy Elliot the problems that they were aware of that had plagued Indian Point in the past few years.

11:27 Discussion continues trying to figure out what stage emergency it presently was. One sgt stated that the Fire Center was confused about the sequence of alerts. He admitted that he "honestly" didn't know himself.

11:29 Hawthorne command called for an ambulance to report to Oregon Corners to simulate something.

11:31 Yorktown police tried to reach the Somers police station by radio. They couldn't be reached.

11:32 Sgt. Massi states that at 10:13 they declared a general emergency and that at 10:51 they declared an on-site emergency. He stated that "they've got it backwards".

11:33 Call from Hawthorne command to Croton to simulate moving barricades to Green sections A1, A2 and A3.

11:34 Both sargents check map for Green section in evacuation room.

11:36 Croton call to Hawthorne command stating that Green sections A1, A2 and A3 were not in their jurisdiction.

11:37 Sgt. Massi calls Hawthorne command for weather information. Hawthorne replied that there was no information available.

11:45 Hawthorne request Yorktown to check with Somers to see if there were any barricades available. They were not called because they couldn't be reached before.

11:50 Yorktown called Hawthorne command for weather information about wind direction. Hawthorne replied that there was no wind or weather information available and that there wouldn't be any that day.

11:54 Hawthorne called Yorktown to request two cars to be dispatched, one to Route 6 and the Taconic State Parkway and the other to Routes 35 and 202 and Pinesbridge Road.

11:57 Patrol cars told to proceed to above locations and to standby. They were to simulate blocking traffic.

11:59 Yorktown told to notify Hawthorne when the cars were in position.

12:00 Yorktown told by Fire Control Center to notify Somers Fire Department to be on standby and that everyone was to remain indoors at the fire house.

12:04 All fire departments put on notice from Fire Control via the fire phone. Somers fire department still not reachable.

12:06 All personnel told to standby by the hot line. "This is a drill." Radio message that at 11:50 Governor Cuomo took control and declared a State of Emergency. Zones 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 were to be evacuated. Zones 10, 11 and 14 were to be sheltered.

12:07 Second car reported back that he was in position.

12:08 Yorktown police turn on WABC. Only the regular news was being broadcast. Radio turned off. Sgts Arruda and Massi check wall map for specified areas.

12:09 Check by Hawthorne command to see if hotline messages were received. They were.

12:11 Desk officer checks WABC to see if any relevant news was on. There wasn't. Radio turned off.

12:11 Request from command center as to availability of local ambulances. Yorktown police call Yorktown Volunteer Ambulance Corp. Told both ambulances were not available. Ambulance Corp would notify police when an ambulance was available.

12:12 Mohegan Ambulance Corp called. Responded that both vehicles were in the building.

12:19 Sgt Arruda phones a Mr Kesnan (?) at ext. 284 to clarify term "emergency" at Indian Point 3. Previous discussion with others in office questioned the term.

12:19 Responses to command center on status of ambulances; 2 out and 2 available.

12:20 Discussion in office of events. Sgt Arruda remarks that they "don't tell us a hill of beans".

12:22 Call from command center to check radio communications. They were received well.

12:23 Command center radioed that the wind was south-easterly.

12:24 A civil defense person left with badges and radiation pills.

12:26 Yorktown officers checking evacuation booklet for evacuation routes.

12:32 Sgt comments that "if this was the real thing, forget it."

12:32 Command center radioed that they were going to simulate evacuating 2 persons from the Cortland nursing home. They were to be transported to Kent by ambulance.

12:33 Sgt. Arruda replies that both Yorktown ambulances were still busy. He would call Mohegan Lake. Sgt. Arruda commented to Officer Juliano (who was recording the day's events) that they would simulate calling Mohegan. No call was ever made.

12:36 Sgt Massi tests the emergency radio backup transmitter. It worked.

12:37 Patrolman enters desk area and asks if the "reactor (blew) up yet". Desk officer replied "no, not yet".

12:50 Sgt Arruda calls person at Ext 284. No answer.

12:52 Yorktown ambulance calls to clarify the need of an ambulance in reference to the previous request. Ambulance told that police had not received any different instructions and that they should call if their status changed.

12:56 Official emergency evacuation manuals brought into evacuation room. At least two very thick volumes. Sgts studying them.

1:00 Hawthorne command on radio requesting check of traffic on routes 9 and 9A and on Croton Ave.

1:20 Official observer call for comment. Speaker to Sgts.

1:26 Cortland police department radios saying they were evacuating. Could they come to the Yorktown headquarters and bring 10 persons and their radio equipment. Nancy Elliot gives permission.

1:32 Sgt Arruda requests traffic status from his patrols.

1:42 Sgt Arruda replies to Sgt Massi that there has been "no change" in reference to on-going situation.

1:46 Hawthorne command radios that all special assignments should be recalled. County patrols told to resume normal patrols.

1:49 Yorktown notifies its patrols to resume normal duty.