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15 ROPE FERRY ROAD



WATERFORD, CT. 06385-2886

61 FR 24307

May 14, 1996

(2)

September 9, 1996

Chief, Rules Review and Directive Branch
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Mail Stop T-6D59
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO EVACUATION GUIDELINES

Dear Chief:

I write to express my concern with an article (copy enclosed) which appeared in our local newspaper, The Day, on August 29, 1996 entitled "NRC advising quick evacuation in the event of nuclear accident".

As I am sure you are aware, the Town of Waterford, of which I am First Selectman, is the host community of three nuclear power plants. We also have an emergency management center and a cadre of department heads who have been trained to respond to all sorts of accidents, including nuclear. We have consistently received the highest marks from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for our emergency response to simulated accidents at the nuclear plant.

The article I refer to indicates that "studies of severe reactor sequences ... clearly indicate that ... prompt evacuation of the area that is near the plants is much more effective in reducing the risk of early health effects than sheltering". This has caused some concern among the cadre as well as residents in our community. The article further states that both the NRC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency support the policy change and that the changes are expected to become official within 90 days unless public comment leads to further amendments to the proposals.

My specific concern relates to the fact that this is the first time we have been made aware that any changes are contemplated; secondly, notification through the media does not seem like an appropriate way to notify host communities of nuclear power plants of pending changes as important as the one that the article would indicate.

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ID: R-5-1 Emergency Planning

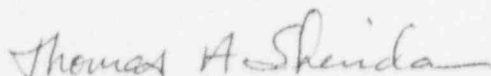
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(61FR24307)

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I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with the appropriate person responsible for suggesting these changes and to have an opportunity to understand what is motivating the change. Surely it was not your intention to proceed with major procedural changes without consultation with the individuals responsible for insuring the public safety should a nuclear release occur. Your prompt response to this letter would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Sheridan
First Selectman

TAS/kk

cc: Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, Chairman, USNRC
Mr. Frank Grandone, CT Office of Emergency Management
Chief Murray Pendleton, Wtfd. Dir. of Emergency Management

NRC advising quick evacuation in the event of nuclear accident

Wait-and-see policy no longer part of the plan

By PAUL CHOINIERE
Day Staff Writer

Waterford — Federal regulators are calling for immediate evacuations around nuclear power plants in the event of serious accidents, saying that officials should no longer wait to assess the situation.

Guidelines in place since

1980 call for residents in a two-mile radius of the plant to take shelter in offices, homes and schools. The policy was intended to give emergency officials time to evaluate the seriousness of the accident and the potential for a major release of radioactivity.

But emergency officials have re-examined that strategy and concluded it is not a good one.

"Studies of severe reactor sequences ... clearly indicate that for all but a very limited set of conditions, prompt evacuation of the area that is

near the plant is much more effective in reducing the risk of early health effects than sheltering," states a policy paper submitted June 25 to members of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Both the NRC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency support the policy change. It is expected to become official in 90 days unless public comment leads to further amendments in the proposal.

The concern in a nuclear-plant accident is not an explo-

See NRC page A6

NRC advises immediate evacuation in

From A1

sion, but the release of dangerously high levels of radioactivity, an invisible killer.

The most likely event to cause a severe nuclear accident is loss of the coolant that circulates around the reactor. Without coolant, the fuel rods can become superheated and begin to melt, creating pressures so severe inside the containment building that radioactive steam would have to be released into the environment.

And in the most severe accident, there are no guarantees that containment could be maintained.

"During the first few hours of an accident at a nuclear plant, critical decisions may be necessary concerning protective actions for the public," states the document.

In a situation in which the condition of the reactor is deteriorating, or threatens to deteriorate, the guideline will no longer be to wait, but to begin evacuating a 2-mile radius of the plant, according to the proposed change.

No major changes

Frank Grandone, chief of plans and operations for the Connecticut Office of Emergency Management, said the proposed change would not mean significant changes in state emergency planning.

Grandone said Connecticut already takes a more conservative approach in its planning than do the federal guidelines. He said the state has long taken the view that in the event of a severe accident at a nuclear plant, evacuations would begin.

The state has three nuclear plants in Waterford at the Millstone Nuclear Power Station and a single reactor at the Connecticut Yankee Nuclear Power Station in Haddam. All four plants are currently shut down because of violations of federal regulations.

Under a "take-shelter" order, residents are urged to stay indoors and close all windows, doors, air conditioners and vents. Grandone said such an order would only be issued if the state knew that only a short burst of radioactive material was being released and that the emergency was otherwise under control.

Residents might also be advised to take shelter if severe weather or a natural disaster precluded safe travel.

During evacuations, residents are directed to travel to "host communities" outside a 10-mile radius of

the plant. Groton residents, for example, would go to Norwich, and New London citizens to Windham. Evacuation routes are listed in the telephone directory.

In the most serious accident — involving the "actual or potential release of large amounts of radioactivity" — evacuation in a 5-mile radius and a take-shelter order in a radius of five to 10 miles is recommended. The final decision to evacuate is made by the governor.

The NRC said it has been advising evacuations, rather than ordering

shelter, during training workshops and in emergency manuals for several years. But there has never been a formal change in policy.

Emergency drills have shown the agency that some emergency officials were still using the old guidelines.

Unrealistic to critics

Anti-nuclear activists have long criticized evacuation scenarios as unrealistic. Parents, for instance, are not supposed to go to schools and get their children, but instead meet

up with them in the homes. They also point to the accident at Chernobyl in the Ukraine, where the damage to the nuclear plant occurred far outside the emergency area.

The nuclear industry regulators say the systems in nuclear plants are highly reliable.

The emergency guidelines were developed in the wake

event of nuclear accident

most communi-
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Mile Island accident in Pen-
sylvania in March 1979. State and
federal officials were criticized for a
lack of advance planning. Though no
evacuation was ordered, as many as
200,000 people fled a 50-mile area
around the plant.

Gov. Dick Thornburgh did rec-
ommend the evacuation of pregnant
women and young children living
within a 5-mile radius.

State studies found no evidence of
increased human cancers or other
radiation-related problems in the
wake of that accident. But anti-

nuclear activists have claimed that
cancers and animal mutations are
higher than normal.

The country has not had a serious
emergency at a commercial nuclear
plant since the guidelines were
adopted.

*Comments on the proposed
changes in evacuation guidelines
can be submitted to: Chief, Rules
Review and Directive Branch, U.S.
Nuclear Regulatory Commission,
Mail Stop T-6D59, Washington D.C.
20555-0001. Comments must be sub-
mitted within 90 days.*

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