

NORTH COUNTY NEWS

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Indian Point Drill tests responders

By Abby Luby

A drill last week tested emergency workers to see how quickly and effectively they could respond to a serious accident at the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

Scenarios in the day long exercise on Dec. 3 started with a power failure at the Indian Point Unit 3 reactor which causes the pumps supplying coolant to the reactor to stop working. This led to a leak in the containment building releasing an air borne radioactive plume that spread over much of Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Orange counties, the four counties that surround the plant.

The bi-yearly exercise is mandated and reviewed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) who review the responses of the four counties and those of Entergy, the owner Indian Point.

Mock media alerts called for schools within ten miles of the plant to evacuate to reception centers and for the public was told to ingest KI-potassium iodide pills to prevent thyroid cancer in case of radiation exposure. Eventually the emergency exercise had counties close state and local parks and the Hudson River from the Tappan-Zee Bridge to the Newburgh Beacon Bridge.

Unexpected “events” included a bomb scare at a school, an accident and water main break on Route 9, the failure of sirens in Ossining, Yorktown, Croton and Mohegan Lake. Residents living within the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) were advised to review their emergency planning booklet or get evacuation information on the internet. Evacuees arriving at reception centers were advised to take a shower and wash their clothes.



The control hub in the sub basement at the Joint Information Center during Indian Point's emergency drill held last week.

Three floors at the Hudson Valley Transportation Management Center in Hawthorne were dedicated as the drill command center for Westchester and were referred to as the Joint Information Center. In the sub basement rows of desks with computer screens were manned by local responders including staff members of FEMA, NRC, local phone companies, communication networks. Representing the county legislators was legislator Martin Rogowsky (Harrison).

A large screen in the front of the room showed the fake radioactive plume in red spreading out to the four counties.

Participating and watching the progress of the drill was Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano and Tony Sutton, Westchester commissioner of Emergency Management. They said they were pleased with the county's response.

"Down here you think you're in a real emergency," said Spano. "These drills are critical. We've been training for the last 10 years and it shows."

Entergy spokesman Jerry Nappi said many staffers at Indian Point had been preparing for the drill months in advance.

"In the event of an actual emergency we are prepared." Nappi said the drill laid out an unlikely scenario in which many things would have to go wrong.

In the lobby of the Joint Information Center two large flat video screens flanked a podium facing seats for the "assimilated" press. Teleconferencing in were emergency spokespersons from the four counties. The real media was not allowed to participate in the drill, but could ask questions after the "press conferences" which ran throughout the day. Playing a reporter was Entergy staffer Carol Morrissey.

"I choose to be a CNN reporter," she said. "We were given sample questions before to be directed mostly to the county and the state, but we could also ask our own questions."

By 12:30 p.m., two hours after calling for an evacuation, the counties reported that all students had safely arrived at their reception centers over 10 miles away from Indian Point. Other announcements included precautionary actions for local farmers to guard animals, feed and water. Officials promised that milk, soil, and crops would be sampled at a later time for radioactive contamination. A list of emergency bus stops were announced for people living within the EPZ to be used to evacuate the area. People evacuating in their own cars were urged to drive to the homes of relatives living outside the EPZ.

According to Spano's office the county pays out about \$3 million a year for emergency preparedness related to Indian Point of which Entergy kicks in about \$400,000.

A review by FEMA and the NRC is expected within 30 days.