



## CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

### The Nicest Paparazzi Ever!

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with his camera in hand; "François did not seem annoyed; he felt I just wanted to say, 'Hello.'" He remembered me when I saw him again and even dedicated his famous song 'Alexandrie, Alexandra, to me' when he saw me at another of his concerts," confided Yahya.

Attending the Cannes Film Festival in 1980 must have been like a kid's first visit to a toy store. Click-happy Yahya started posing with everyone in sight and they welcomed it: "There was this director Coppola? You know, Nicolas Cage's uncle? He was a very nice man. I went up to him and asked him if I could take a picture with him. Then he started to say something to me, but my English was really bad at the time, I told him 'I don't speak English,' but he was still talking. He said, 'I want you in a film.' Honestly! Even if you look at the picture, you'll see that he's looking at me while I look straight at the camera. He's my friend, you know. A really nice man, who always smiles when he sees me. Later, when I was in Cairo for a visit, I showed the picture to my friends. One of them got angry with me. He went mad! 'Do you know who this is?!' he asked incredulously. 'He's a nice man,' I said. They each said, 'I can't believe you met Francis Ford Coppola, he's the greatest director in the world!'

During the 1980s, with Yahya as his right-hand man, Saad opened a new company installing saunas and bathtubs in the homes of wealthy families in Jeddah. Although Yahya did his share of the work, his dream was shifting to the West. He remembers going back and forth to the States three times, in 1980, '82 and '84, but with every visit he was aware that taxes and living expenses would get in the way of starting his own business.

Over the following decade, Yahya continued to work in Saudi Arabia, got married and had

two sons in Alexandria. Both of them continued their studies with excellent grades and joined him to continue their Masters degrees in the States when he settled down in California.

Ever persistent, he flew back to America in 1996, determined to find work. Struggling and starting from scratch again Yahya had to familiarize himself with the American electrical system. He began to make house calls, frequenting celebrity homes in Beverly Hills and all of LA: "The first celebrity I spotted in America was Anthony Quinn and I couldn't believe my eyes. I completely went crazy. I was in Raquel Welch's house just doing some fixing. She's stingy, though; I don't think I'll be going there again," he says.

Shuffling through the pictures, the presenter kept quizzing him on names to which Yahya repeatedly gave his now famous answer, "I don't know, but he is a nice guy." The episode then documented the making of the shot of Brad Pitt that Yahya took inside his car. Pitt and Yahya have become friends since then. He once visited Pitt on the set of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, which he was shooting with Angelina Jolie.

Bars, clubs, restaurants, shops - Yahya knows exactly where to go. Readily equipped with a digital camera now, there's nothing stopping him. "I caught Snoop Dogg on his way out of a club one night. You should have seen the size of his bodyguard! It took some shuffling to get past him, but Snoop was so nice. One of my favorite clubbers is Leonardo DiCaprio. Even though he's known to run away from photographers, he always hugs me and says, 'Hello.' I have a picture of him accepting my papyrus roll gift. He loved it and asked me to get him a full-size mummy next time. I also really liked the late Christopher Reeves. He was so kind. Once at the Cannes Film Festival I said, 'Sir, can I?,' and Reeves interrupted saying, 'don't call me sir, you're a friend.'

"It helps to know where celebrities like to



*Yahya with Mini Me*

hang out, like the Steak House where he took his famous shot with Bill Clinton. That picture really created a stir when I took it back to Alexandria and a friend of mine accused me of computer-manipulating my images. I was really upset because I couldn't prove otherwise to him. But why would I do that? The pictures are genuine; I never even tried to sell any of them. Some of them are vintage classics signed by Jack Lemon and Charles Bronson. I've even been approached to compile them into a book. I've also been repeatedly asked to write my biography. I like the idea. Maybe I will," he told me, smiling.

Yahya goes on forever: "When I met George Clooney, he laughed and said, 'Yahya, you're always on E!, even more than me! A few years ago, I again met Paul McCartney, who laughed saying, 'Yahya, you have been chasing me for 25 years. Also, Al Pacino's father, Salvatore, I met him one night while he was dining in some restaurant. But a few months later he unfortunately passed away. When I met Al Pacino a few months afterwards backstage at a play he was doing in Los Angeles, I showed him his father's photo, and he was moved. He asked me if he could keep it because it was the last photo taken of him."



*Yahya with Vin Diesel*

Yahya keeps a very organized large portfolio of photos he has gathered over the past three decades, all compiled in sections like The Heavyweights, with names like Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, and Martin Scorsese; then there is the wrestling section, African-American, a sports section that includes Agassi and Sampras. Broken down into subsections, Matt Damon's photo is next to his friend Ben Affleck, and director Tony Scott next to his brother Ridley Scott, as well as the Star Trek captain, William Shatner.

Over thirty years, Yahya's smile continues to be endearing and disarming. If you don't believe me, look at the photos.

*Born in Cairo, Egypt, Sherif Awad is a film/video critic and curator. He is the film editor of Egypt Today Magazine, and the artistic director for both the Alexandria Film Festival, in Egypt, and the Arab Rotterdam Festival, in The Netherlands. He also contributes to Variety, in the United States, and Variety Arabia, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).*

## ENERGY ISSUES

### Indian Point Fire Safety Outdated

#### Exemptions Denied

By **ABBY LUBY**



BUCHANAN, NY -- Several fire safety practices at the Indian Point Nuclear power plants would be ineffective in detecting and extinguishing a fire, according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Last week the federal agency denied the plant's request to be exempt from updating certain fire safety regulations because of potential dangers and risks posed by several of the plant's non-compliant fire safety measures. Of the 50 exemption requests, 42 were turned down.

"The new requirements state that the company has to have a means [to extinguish fires] that don't involve operators having to go

to where the fire is," said NRC spokesperson Neil Sheehan.

Fire safety regulations have been a serious issue at nuclear power plants since 1975 when a significant fire at the Browns Ferry nuclear reactor in Alabama disabled and ate through hundreds of electric cables running safety systems that could allow operators to control the reactor in an emergency and shut it down if necessary.

In 2000 the NRC began inspecting nuclear power plants for inappropriate fire protection systems and procedures and found many plants relied on their work force to manually respond to fires. In 2006 the NRC updated their fire protection regulations and required plants to comply with the new fire safety procedures by 2009. Compliance required automatic detection

and suppression of fires.

In a 98-page letter of February 1, 2012 in which the NRC denied Indian Point owner Entergy exemption requests, numerous non-compliant "fire zones" at the plant were cited that currently required plant workers to manually respond to a fire. For example, one particular zone included a control room, turbine building, superheater building, nuclear service building, chemical systems building and administration building. Combustibles in this particular zone were in "cable insulation, lube oil, vinyl insulation, and hydrogen," and that "transient combustibles in this zone consist of trash, cardboard drums, lube oil, fiberglass ladders, paint, and radiation boundaries."

According to Sheehan, there are 350 fire zones at Indian Point. "This is a typical number for these types of reactors. However, plant



owners are free to define what they consider a fire zone, so the numbers can vary."

Entergy spokesperson Jerry Nappi said Indian Point conducts fire watches on an hourly basis and on an 'as-needed' basis for areas that are undergoing work. Nappi also said the plant had a trained fire brigade of about 100 members.

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## ENERGY ISSUES

### Indian Point Fire Safety Outdated

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"This is not a volunteer position but a requirement. They undergo training at an accredited fire training academy offsite prior to being able to stand watch or begin working in the plant. They also undergo annual re-qualification training and periodic drills throughout the year."

Although there is no fire truck on site, Nappi said there is a large volume of designated water for fires stored in several tanks, which is more than the amount of water contained in a fire truck. Overall Nappi added that, "the plant has several installed fixed suppression systems including foam systems, and fire water systems covering all areas of the plant. Fire water systems support sprinklers, hydrants, and hose stations."

Denying exemptions is rare for the NRC. According to audits by the federal Government Accounting Office and the NRC's own Inspector General, between 1982 and 2001 the NRC handed out 900 exemptions from the fire safety regulations to nuclear power plants across the country. It's unknown how many exemptions the NRC granted from 2001 to 2011. In 2007 the NRC granted an exemption to Indian Point that allowed them to use a lower quality fire resistant material known as Hemyc which resists fire for only 24 minutes, a period of time critics claimed wouldn't be long enough to catch and contain a fire in an area that was monitored hourly.

Allowing Indian Point to use Hemyc exposed the exemption process for being non-transparent and secretive, where the exchange between the NRC and power plant

owners excludes the public. Challenging the legality of the Hemyc exemption in 2009 was Richard Brodsky. The former New York assemblyman sued the NRC claiming the practice of exempting nuclear plants from binding safety requirements was illegal. Brodsky claimed that "Rather than require Entergy to upgrade the insulation to meet its own requirements, the NRC in complete secrecy with no public announcement, no public participation, and no public hearing, granted Entergy an exemption." The case is still pending in the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York. Co-plaintiffs are the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club.

The NRC's rejection of Indian Point's exemption requests was applauded by New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman who saw the action supporting his own petition submitted to the NRC last March urging the federal agency to take enforcement action against Indian Point for "continued failure to comply with federal fire safety regulations established to keep plants secure in an emergency." The petition is still pending. Both Schneiderman and Governor Andrew Cuomo have been active in opposing Indian Point's application for a 20-year extension of the plants' operating licenses.

In a press release last week Schneiderman said "The NRC should be commended for its action on this matter. However, many basic questions still remain regarding the safety of Indian Point and the security of the 17 million people who live and work in close proximity to the nuclear plant. We will continue to use the full force of this office to push the NRC to fully evaluate -- and ensure -- Indian Point's safety."

Indian Point has 30 days in which to



respond to the NRC's letter. Entergy spokesperson Jim Steets said costs to upgrade the fire safety systems won't be significant.

"We spent \$70 million on maintenance and depending on how long it takes to install a new system, the cost will be absorbed in the maintenance budget. We originally thought we could accomplish the same [fire safety practices] to avoid lengthy development and the review process. You don't want to spend money you

don't need to spend."

*Photos by Abby Luby and courtesy of Abby Luby Photo.*

*Abby Luby is a Westchester based, freelance journalist who writes local news, about environmental issues, art, entertainment and food. Her debut novel, "Nuclear Romance" was recently published. Visit the book's website, [http://nuclearromance.word-press.com/](http://nuclearromance.wordpress.com/).*

## GAMING

### DiNapoli Warns of Lottery Scam Using Fake Checks

ALBANY, NY -- New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli today warned of a lottery scam involving mail containing fraudulent checks that appear to have been issued by New York State.

"An offer of easy money is usually too good to be true and that is the case here," DiNapoli said. "If you receive one of these fraudulent checks, please report it my office immediately."

DiNapoli's office has referred the matter to federal law enforcement.

Here is how the scam works: the



scammers send potential victims a letter telling them that they are a winner of a lottery or sweepstakes drawing. The person receiving the check is directed to pay an amount to the scammer in order to secure his or her "full winnings." Before the depositing bank has learned that the check is fake, the victim has already transferred the funds. Any money wired to the scammers cannot be retrieved. The recent letters are from scam artists representing themselves as "Guaranty Trust Inc." with a New York

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