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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will hold a public meeting tomorrow on safety at the Indian Point nuclear power plant. Photo by Bloomberg News

Nuke plant firefight

BY ABBY LUBY
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

A MATTER of 24 minutes could affect the lives of 20 million people within 30 miles of the Indian Point Nuclear Plant.

That's the core of an argument awaiting a ruling from a federal appeals court in a case against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for allowing lower-quality fire barriers at the Westchester County plant 24 miles outside of the city.

The case also marks the first time the NRC is challenged to grant so-called exemptions that affect public safety without alerting the public.

The court case comes on the heels of an NRC public meeting tomorrow night on safety at Indian Point.

The meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. at the Doubletree Hotel, 455 South Broadway in Tarrytown, with an informational open house starting at 5:30 p.m. The NRC will

High court to rule on barriers OK'd for Indian Pt.

address ground-water contamination, radioactive spent fuel storage and emergency planning.

Last week, State Assistant Attorney General John Sipos and Assemblyman Richard Brodsky (D-Westchester) told a three-judge panel in Manhattan Federal appeals court that the NRC's decision drastically compromises the safety of workers at Indian Point and some 20 million others within 30 miles of the nuclear plant.

Last year, the NRC granted a request from Entergy, the plant owners, to use fire safety insulation material that resists fire for only 24 minutes — not enough time to catch and contain a fire with the current hourly inspection schedule, the plaintiffs said.

Sipos and Brodsky also argued in court there would be a danger

of fires in electrical junction boxes that control safe, emergency shutdowns, if needed.

NRC attorney Robert Rader countered that NRC staff determined there was a "reasonable assurance" fire-protection measures approved by the exemptions would control any credible blaze at the plant.

Rader said the NRC analyzed the requested exemptions in depth and found them adequately protective and were assured that the "underlying purpose of the fire protection rule had been met."

The NRC said that using lower-

quality fire barriers has been allowed at many other plants in the country, and the NRC has granted similar exemptions to certain fire safety standards over the last eight years.

The dispute also involves the NRC's rules for granting exemptions without requiring public notification or participation.

Rader said the agency's rules for granting exemptions are spelled out in the Atomic Energy Act as part of the "comprehensive regulatory framework" and the "ongoing review of nuclear power plants located in the United States."

The 'underlying purpose of the rule had been met' for the exemptions.

Robert Rader

Rivers of red ink at Elections Bd.: chief

BY FRANK LOMBARDI
DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

THE CITY'S Board of Elections needs a budget bailout — a big one.

The board will end its budget year next month with a \$11.5 million deficit, according to its executive director, Marcus Cederqvist.

He also projected a \$13.6 million deficit for the next fiscal year — which could grow to \$27 million if there's a city-wide runoff election later this year in the elections for mayor, public advocate or controller.

Cederqvist blamed the deficit partly on the huge costs of conducting last year's presidential election, which drew a record number of last-minute voter registrations that ran up overtime and other costs.

Added to that was \$1 million for a special election in February for three vacant City Council seats, and \$500,000 for the upcoming special election June 2 for two vacant Bronx Assembly seats.

"Elections aren't free," Cederqvist said at a City Council budget hearing Monday, laying the blame for the board's deficit at Mayor Bloomberg's doorstep for not providing additional funding.

"The lack of support from city leaders has put the board's mission to conduct fair and honest elections in jeopardy," Cederqvist testified.

Bloomberg has been a longtime critic of the board, contending that it's a patronage pit that is badly managed.

In the past, the city has provided additional funding to the board through budget modifications. But so far, that hasn't happened this year, except for \$2.5 million in the mayor's new executive budget for the April 21 special election for Bronx borough president.

Board attorney Steven Richman said that while the board is legally obligated by city law to not overspend its budget, it also is under a legal obligation to conduct all required elections.

"The alternative would be to deny the voters their voting rights," Richman testified.

flombardi@nydailynews.com