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Group Urges Expanded Planning for Indian Point Disaster

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Most nearby communities lack emergency plans, says report



Clouds hang over the Indian Point Nuclear Power plant in Buchanan, New York, in August. Photo: Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal

Most communities located within 50 miles of the Indian Point Energy Center in Buchanan, N.Y., don't have emergency plans to respond to a nuclear accident, according to a report to be released Wednesday.

The federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission requires communities located within 10 miles of nuclear power plants to develop emergency plans. In New York, the four counties within 10 miles of Indian Point—Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Orange—have taken such measures.

But the Disaster Accountability Project, a nonprofit organization that monitors disaster-response programs and the author of the report, cited the commission's response to the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima, Japan, in which it recommended that U.S. citizens within 50 miles evacuate.

[Entergy Corp. ETR 0.18 %](#), which operates Indian Point, said that 10 miles "provides a robust safety margin" and the Fukushima advisory reflected that area's bigger power complex and the lack of information surrounding that accident.

Warning Zone

A new report recommends that areas within 50 miles of the Indian Point power plant have emergency-evacuation plans in case of a nuclear accident, wider than the 10-mile radius required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.



Source: Disaster Accountability Project

"There is a well-documented scientific basis for the current 10-mile radius of emergency planning zones for nuclear power plants in the U.S.," said Jerry Nappi, an Entergy spokesman. "In the unlikely case of a radiological event, the public will be well-informed and well-protected."

The NRC, in response to the Disaster Accountability Project's recommendations, said that the current 10-mile zone for emergency planning is appropriate and that plans in those areas will provide adequate protection to the public in a nuclear accident.

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said the Fukushima site isn't comparable to any in the U.S. "Quite frankly, we don't have any nuclear-plant complexes where you have so many reactors packed so closely together."

The Disaster Accountability Project, however, said that U.S. communities 10 to 50 miles away from plants, which in Indian Point's case would include the New York City metropolitan area as well as swaths of New Jersey and Connecticut, should provide guidance to residents on how to respond in an emergency. It further recommended those areas study how many of their residents would evacuate even if such action wasn't required.

"Communities should demand this planning if Washington won't," said Ben Smilowitz, executive director of the Disaster Accountability Project.

The Disaster Accountability Project sent freedom-of-information requests to 20 jurisdictions in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut located 10 to 50 miles from Indian Point, inquiring about emergency plans they have in place related to the power plant and what educational materials they provide to residents.

Those communities are exempt from the NRC's emergency-planning zones, so most haven't developed such plans or conducted studies. According to several of them, they couldn't without help from the federal government.

"I'm not against the planning. It's where is the funding going to come from to make it happen?" said Steven Peterson, director of emergency management for Ulster County, N.Y., about 25 miles from Indian Point. The county has a general emergency-management plan, just not one specific to the plant, he said.

Dutchess County, about 15 miles from Indian Point, doesn't have educational materials for residents or emergency plans specific to the power plant, according to the report. It also hasn't studied how many of its residents would evacuate in the event of emergency.

Dana Smith, Dutchess County's commissioner of emergency response, said in a statement that the county "does not have the staffing or the expertise to undertake these planning efforts independently without federal guidance and support."



High voltage signs hang at the Indian Point plant. Photo: Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal

Sussex County, N.J., about 25 miles from Indian Point, also doesn't give educational materials to residents. Mark Vogel, deputy coordinator of the county's Office of Emergency Management, said local officials attended a New York-New Jersey training course in March and will soon provide radiological information to New Jersey residents, farmers, food processors and distributors.

New York City didn't provide information on emergency plans related specifically to Indian Point when the Disaster Accountability Project made its freedom-of-information requests. But in statement, officials from New York City Emergency Management said the agency has coordinated with state and Westchester County officials on Indian Point preparedness.

City officials also said they would activate the city's radiological response and recovery plan and, if needed, implement its area evacuation plan if there was an incident at Indian Point.

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