

NUCLEAR MATTERS: Radiological emergency plan for Cape Cod does not comply with NRC mandate

By Diane Turco

[Wicked Local Plymouth](#)

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The ongoing Fukushima disaster and the fact that the aging Pilgrim Nuclear Power Reactor (Pilgrim) in Plymouth is of the same Mark I design that failed in Japan has heightened awareness and concern among citizens across the region. Whether one is for or against nuclear power, all area residents have reason to be concerned about public safety.

Cape Codders are currently questioning the evacuation and radiological emergency plan for the public, which is required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and designed by Entergy and MEMA.

As of now, only residents within a 10-mile radius of Pilgrim are subject to the evacuation plan. This is the “EPZ” – the emergency planning zone. However, in Japan the NRC called for American citizens within a 50-mile zone to evacuate. If replicated here, that area would include all of Cape Cod. The state has no plans to evacuate Cape Cod residents and visitors. MEMA Director Kurt Schwartz spoke to the Barnstable County Regional Emergency Planning Committee last October and acknowledged that Cape residents would be “in harm’s way,” but would not be evacuated. Instead, the state’s plan knowingly confines residents in a danger zone until they can be eventually relocated elsewhere after exposure.

Currently within the NRC’s established 50-mile Ingestion Pathway Zone, Potassium Iodide pills are distributed to all Cape towns – clearly identifying these residents as an “at risk” population for exposure to radioactive materials. The Department of Public Health publishes safety response plans for farmers and food processors within the 50-mile zone on how to protect their animals and food, acknowledging the need for sheltering. However, there is no sheltering plan in place for human beings on the Cape aside from being directed to stay inside their homes.

Towns outside the EPZ, but within the 15-mile zone (for example, parts of Bourne and Sandwich) are considered in the “Shadow Evacuation Area” – the NRC term that describes the area where spontaneous and uncontrolled evacuations are likely to occur. The state approved emergency plan includes detailed traffic control points outlining blocked roads and redirected routes; however, until recently even emergency responders within this shadow area were unaware of their special status. While MEMA works hand-in-hand with Entergy, the plan was not shared with emergency responders in those areas – these are the people area residents rely on for direction.

In order to avoid interference with the approved 10-mile evacuation procedures, the Sagamore and Bourne Bridges will be closed to prohibit evacuation from the Cape into the flow of people fleeing Plymouth. But concern exists over whether people will really stay put on the Cape and whether people will really follow the plan as written. As observed during the Three Mile Island

nuclear accident in Pennsylvania in 1979, a spontaneous evacuation is likely to occur in areas outside the designed plan. This makes one wonder if this is the most effective public safety plan.

The current plan is reactive to an accident when, in fact, a choice can be made with a proactive stance. According to the NRC website on emergency preparedness, the agency “has the authority to take actions, including shutting down any reactor deemed not to provide reasonable assurance of the protection of public health and safety.” The Entergy/MEMA plans are predicated on the false assumption that plans on paper will work. How can they possibly work when Cape emergency responders were, until recently, unaware of the traffic control points and the plans apparently were written without public process?

The radiological emergency plan is nothing more than a salute to the NRC requirement by Entergy and subsequently approved by MEMA. A proactive plan, which would be in the best interest of public health and safety, is to remove the danger of Pilgrim’s operations by recognizing its inherent flaws and age. A reality-based plan would close the reactor and store the spent fuel in dry casks. This would provide economic conversion plans for Entergy employees and decommission the site, allowing for uses with public benefits and not inherent risks. The public needs to hold the NRC to its mandate.



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Ten, 20, and 50-mile radii around Pilgrim; the State Department recommends that all U.S. citizens within 50 miles of Fukushima evacuate. 2010 census data indicated the population within 10 miles of the plant was 75,835; the population within 50 miles was 4,737,792. Boston center is 35 miles away.

Diane Turco is a resident Harwich and a retired special education teacher. She is working with Cape Downwinders, an organization whose mission is to protect the lives and welfare of residents of Cape Cod and the Islands against the threat of death or injury from Pilgrim Station’s operations.