

NUCLEAR MATTERS: Update on nuclear emergency evacuation planning

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Wicked Local

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The 1979 Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Station accident demonstrated that radiological emergency evacuation planning was needed.

FEMA contracted a company named KLD to develop the software to formulate evacuation traffic management planning for a 10-mile radius around nuclear power stations. These plans first get approved by KLD and the power station owner (Entergy in the case of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth), then by FEMA, and are then passed along to the state emergency management agencies for final approval. In our state this is the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) for Pilgrim. Currently, the plans developed in 2004 are in place and are being updated with the 2010 census data.

Emergency management directors in the towns (Plymouth, Carver, Kingston, Duxbury and Marshfield) located within a 10-mile radius of Pilgrim – also known as the Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) – get a chance to review and comment on the plan. Towns outside of the 10-mile EPZ considered to be in the Ingestion Pathway Zone (IPZ) are not included in the review process and are excluded from preparedness training and information distribution. Cape Downwinders – a group of local activists – obtained a copy of the 2004 “KLD Associates Inc., Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, Development of Evacuation Time Estimates” and brought it to the attention of emergency management directors on Cape Cod.

The Cape Downwinders’ review of the 2004 KLD plans, relative to Cape Cod safety and preparedness, revealed many disturbing facts:

- A mislabeled rotary at the Bourne Bridge
- An omitted rotary at the Bourne Bridge
- Ignored traffic choke points at the mainland side of the Sagamore and Bourne Bridges
- Language masking the physical and enforced closure of the Bourne and Sagamore Bridges to Cape evacuation traffic (Bottom line: If you are on Cape Cod during a severe accident at Pilgrim, you are trapped on Cape Cod.)
- In peripheral towns, evacuation traffic control points have been established without the knowledge or notification of the emergency management directors, police, etc., in those towns.
- The Bourne State Police barracks is using the outdated 1999 edition of the evacuation plans.
- Emergency management directors on Cape Cod had never seen the plans since their conception or did not know the bridges would be closed to Cape Cod evacuation traffic.

Challenging these issues by the Cape Downwinders provoked the Oct. 3 presentation to the Barnstable County Regional Emergency Planning Committee (BCREPC) by MEMA Director Kurt Schwartz, which served as an introduction of the risk to Cape emergency management professionals. The Cape Downwinders' research also instigated a number of meetings (ongoing) with MEMA officials and Cape Cod emergency management directors. Currently, MEMA has committed to working with Cape Cod emergency management directors to improve communication and develop another traffic study specifically addressing a nuclear accident at Pilgrim. The BCREPC, under the chairmanship of Chief George Baker from Mashpee, has also begun work on a Pilgrim task force subcommittee to develop and coordinate nuclear event preparedness on Cape Cod.

Although the process is extremely slow, support and genuine concern has certainly grown in the Cape Cod emergency management community. The emergency management directors in Bourne, Sandwich and Mashpee now know how the traffic in their towns will be rerouted, and Cape Codders are just beginning to realize that the bridges will be closed. And although it's good to know, it's unsettling to realize that we will be trapped on Cape Cod during a nuclear accident.

William Maurer is a retired construction project manager, a Falmouth resident and member of Occupy Falmouth.