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# NEWSLETTER FOR MUNICIPAL EMA'S

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Columbia County EMA

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## **NUCLEAR POWER PLANT RISK & VULNERABILITY**

The nuclear power plant emergency in Japan reminds us that we must remain cognizant of the fact that Columbia County is in proximity to the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station. Our risk is considered low because nuclear power plants in the U.S. have a very good track record and they're designed to withstand the natural and man caused disasters normally occurring in the region. There are also redundant safety systems in place at a nuclear facility to prevent the escape of radioactivity. On the other hand the vulnerability must be regarded as high because a serious episode would have an immediate negative impact on the lives of tens of thousands of people and potential long term consequences for hundreds of thousands more.

## **NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION (NRC)**

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) was created as an independent agency by Congress in 1974 to ensure the safe use of radioactive materials when used for civilian purposes. The NRC's public protection program includes regulations limiting nuclear worker exposure levels, licensing radiological materials, inspecting facilities, radiation monitoring around nuclear facilities and public education. The NRC is also available to provide guidance in support of an emergency response.

## **FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was tasked by the President in 1979 after the Three Mile Island accident, to take the lead role in off site radiological planning and preparedness activities. FEMA's radiological emergency preparedness program is designed to ensure the public will be adequately protected in the event of a nuclear power plant emergency.

## **PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (PEMA)**

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) is the lead state agency when it comes to nuclear power plant emergency planning and preparedness. PEMA is also tasked with coordinating Pennsylvania's response to an emergency. Planning and coordinating the response to a nuclear power plant emergency is a monumental undertaking as it involves several thousand people from state agencies, Columbia, Luzerne, Lackawanna, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Schuylkill, Union and Wyoming County Emergency Management Agencies, twenty seven municipal emergency management agencies eight school districts, three vocational-technical high schools, several American Red Cross Chapters, various volunteer radiological response teams and dozens of police, fire and ambulance

departments, not to mention the private assets that would be required to support an evacuation. The NRC, FEMA and PEMA are lead federal and state agencies but they are by no means the only agencies with a stake in nuclear power plant emergency planning, preparedness and response. Agencies dealing with homeland security, the environment, agriculture, transportation, and health are also involved.

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Another key to a successful response involves public education. The better informed and prepared the public is the better chance of a successful outcome. Every Columbia County resident should make an effort to keep informed on this important issue. It is absolutely imperative that those living and working within 10 miles of the nuclear power plant are intimately familiar with emergency procedures in place. Parents of students in risk schools must be prepared to cooperate with their children's school when it comes to the implementation of their plans.

## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

The value of oversight, preparedness, planning, training and public education can never be over stated; however for the system to be successful and be proved worthwhile it must all come together during the emergency response phase. Alert and notification, disseminating public information, implementing public protective actions, supporting an evacuation, radiological monitoring, decontamination and providing mass care are just some of the many tasks performed at the county and municipal levels. Public safety duties especially at the local levels are principally provided by volunteers, many of which must attend training and participate in drills because of the technical expertise required to perform certain tasks.

There are four public protective actions which could be put into operation in the ten mile emergency planning zone during a serious nuclear power plant emergency where the escape of radioactivity is possible or imminent. These protective actions include: sheltering, a combination of evacuation & sheltering, full evacuation and the ingestion of potassium iodide (KI). Naturally the implementation of any of these public protective actions will depend on recommendations made by experts at the time of the emergency.

Sheltering means to take refuge inside a closed up building with HVAC systems drawing air from the outside shut off. A combination of sheltering and evacuation means the general public will be evacuated however patients in medical facilities would be sheltered because it was determined their evacuation would create for them a greater risk. A full evacuation means medical facilities will also be evacuated. The ingestion of potassium iodide (KI) could be recommended along with any of the other three precautions. KI fills the thyroid gland thus minimizing the possibility of contracting cancer in that part of the body. KI is not an anti-radiation pill and should only be taken when advised to do so by the PA Secretary of Health. As with the ingestion of any medication there are risks associated with taking KI so it's advisable to discuss this with your personal physician.

## **THOSE WITH A STAKE IN LOCAL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE**

A Risk County is a county which is located within the 10 mile emergency planning zone (EPZ) of a nuclear power plant. Risk Counties to the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station (SSES) are:

- Columbia County
- Luzerne County

A Support County provides mass care services and resources to assist a Risk County. Support Counties who have been designated to provide assistance to Columbia County are:

- Lycoming County
- Montour County
- Northumberland County
- Schuylkill County
- Union County

A Risk Municipality is located either fully or partially within the EPZ of a nuclear power plant. Risk Municipalities to SSES located in Columbia County are:

- Berwick Borough
- Briar Creek Borough
- Briar Creek Township
- Beaver Township
- Fishing Creek Township
- Mifflin Township
- North Centre Township
- South Centre Township

A Support Municipality provides manpower and resources to assist a Risk Municipality. Support Municipalities who may be called upon during a SSES emergency to provide assistance in Columbia County are:

- All Columbia County Municipalities not designated as a Risk Municipality

A Risk School District has schools located within the EPZ or students who live in the EPZ. Risk School Districts in Columbia County Are:

- Berwick School District
- Benton School District
- Bloomsburg School District
- Central Columbia School District
- Columbia Montour Vo-Tech H. S.

A Host School provides shelter and care for a Risk School in case of an evacuation. A Host School is also the place where parents of evacuated students are to pick up their children.

- Host Schools providing services to Columbia County Risk Schools are located in the Danville School District.

Route Alerting is a process whereas members of EMA or emergency services go street by street alerting the public to tune into a TV or radio station (providing local news) for important information. Route Alerting during a SSES emergency will be provided within the EPZ by:

- Berwick Fire Department
- Summerhill Fire Company
- Mifflinville Fire Company
- Lime Ridge Fire Company
- Orangeville Fire Company
- Beaver Township Fire Company
- North Centre Township EMA

Traffic Control and Access Control within the 10 mile EPZ will be performed by the following law enforcement agencies:

- Berwick Police Department
- Briar Creek Twp. Police Dept.
- South Centre Twp. Police Dept
- Pennsylvania State police

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NUCLEAR POWER PLANT PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE**

Specific information on the above topics and more can be found on the Columbia County Emergency Management Agency web site at [www.columbiacountyema.org](http://www.columbiacountyema.org) or in the emergency section of a local telephone directory.