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Defense eyed for nuke plants

Associated Press

December 01, 2001

WATERFORD — An advisory panel to Gov. John G. Rowland and state lawmakers passed a resolution Thursday night asking the nation to consider arming its nuclear power plants with mobile air defense systems.

The Connecticut Nuclear Energy Advisory Council also recommended the immediate shipping of nuclear waste to a storage center in Nevada, The Day of New London reported.

Nuclear plants such as Indian Point north of New York City are "sweet targets," and attacks on them could cause catastrophic damage, said John Markowicz, co-chairman of the advisory panel.

Markowicz said the panel passed the resolution with the intent of it being forwarded to nationally elected leaders.

The council was created several years ago to advise the governor and legislature on nuclear energy issues.

American plants could be equipped with Hawk and Patriot missile defense systems that currently protect Europe from a Russian invasion, Markowicz said.

Employing a series of mobile defense units would make terrorists unsure whether a plant was vulnerable to attack, he said.

The advisory panel met in Waterford, home to the Millstone Nuclear Power Station.

Members said they were worried about the vulnerability of buildings that contain high-level nuclear waste. Such waste is kept in storage pools at Millstone and other plants.

Nuclear reactors are protected with steel-reinforced concrete, but other structures containing radioactive material are not, they said.

Panel members said as much radioactive material as possible should be sent to the storage facility proposed at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

"It is now in the national interest as well as a matter of national security to activate the national repository and relocate nuclear waste from Connecticut to this more secure location," the council said in its resolution.

Also Thursday, panel members learned that National Guard troops ended their duty at Millstone on Nov. 20. Peter Hyde, a Millstone spokesman, said additional private security guards were hired before the Guard left.

In other business, officials with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission told the advisory panel that the NRC is continuing its investigation of two highly radioactive fuel rods at Millstone that are missing.

The missing rods were damaged in 1972 and removed and placed in the storage pool.

The rods, 13 feet long and half an inch in diameter, were last verified to be in the pool in 1980.

Documentation of their whereabouts did not exist following 1980, according to the NRC.

The rods were discovered to be missing during an inventory of Millstone's nuclear waste storage pool last November.

A \$9 million study by Northeast Utilities, former owner of Millstone, was unable to reach any firm conclusion about the whereabouts of the fuel rods.

The study was completed in October.

Investigators determined that rods may have been mistaken for other equipment, cut into pieces within the storage pool and shipped in a shielded container to the low-level radioactive waste dump in Barnwell, S.C., in May 1988.

Todd Jackson, an NRC representative leading the probe of the missing rods, said the investigation will be completed next month and a report will be released in January, the Norwich Bulletin reported.

Jackson said it was unlikely that the rods were still in the Millstone storage pool, but added that no one can be 100 percent certain because not every inch of the pool can be searched.

Advisory panel members were incredulous that a full inventory of the nuclear materials in the pool could not be taken.

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