



Hundreds urge shutdown of Indian Point

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WHITE PLAINS — More than 500 people chanting, "Shut it down! Shut it down!" rallied at the Westchester County Center last night and called for the immediate closing of the Indian Point nuclear power plants in Buchanan.

The demonstrators, many holding candles or waving anti-Indian Point banners, cheered speaker after speaker who warned of the dangers posed by the nuclear site and pledged to work toward shutting it down.

"This is the largest mobilization of citizens across Westchester County since the Vietnam War," Greenburgh Town Supervisor Paul Feiner, a rally organizer, said to continuous cheers.

"More and more towns are adding their voices to a growing coalition that is spreading the word that Indian Point has to go," he said.

Feiner has joined an environmental coalition urging every municipal body within 50 miles of Indian Point to adopt resolutions urging the closing of the plants. The organizations mobilized after the Sept. 11 attacks, amid growing fears that a suicide assault on Indian Point could unleash a radioactive cloud over the region.

Feiner was a featured speaker at the rally, which preceded a joint hearing of the county Board of Legislators' public safety, health and environment committees on the effectiveness of the emergency evacuation plan for the region around Indian Point.

The legislature is considering a resolution by Legislator Thomas Abinanti, D-Greenburgh, declaring the evacuation plan unworkable and calling on the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to shut the plants down.

Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, D-Greenburgh, who addressed the rally and the hearing, looked out over the crowd and declared that "for too long, the issue of nuclear safety has been avoided by politicians. But the dangers posed by this plant far outweigh any possible benefits.

"It is a threat, and we have to stop it."

Brodsky said the Assembly environmental conservation committee will begin holding hearings in White Plains on Thursday on the defects in the state's evacuation plans. He said the committee will, if necessary, subpoena state emergency planning officials and take testimony under oath on all aspects of the plan.

"You cannot do after an Indian Point accident what we are now trying to do at the World Trade Center — dig it out, clean it up and rebuild," Brodsky said. "If we are wrong about Indian Point's safety and there is a catastrophe, then there will be silence. This area will be empty. There is no possible recovery."

Opponents of the the nuclear plants have focused on the evacuation plan, which every nuclear facility is required to have. The environmental organization Riverkeeper has filed a formal petition with the NRC asking that the plan be decertified and the plant shut down.

Riverkeeper Director Alex Matthiessen began the rally by pledging to use every legal means to close the plants.

"We're gonna sue the pants off these guys (at) every possible turn," he said.

The groups filed inside the center, filling the 420-seat Little Theater and part of an overflow room as the legislators began formal hearings on the possible dangers of the site and the defects of the evacuation plan.

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Legislator William Ryan, D-White Plains, chairman of the public safety committee, convened the meeting by saying, "I can remember when Indian Point was an amusement park, and some of you may want it to become an amusement park again.

"As the plant gets older, there is a legitimate question as to how reliable it is. And since Sept. 11, there is a question as to whether it is a good idea to have a nuclear plant in such a heavily populated area."

Jim Steets, a spokesman for Entergy Nuclear Inc., which owns Indian Point, was hissed as he said, "We are very pleased to report that Indian Point is safer and more secure than ever before. Entergy is committed to the long-term security of the site."

He said the reactor containment buildings "are the strongest, safest nonmilitary facilities in the country. Indian Point is secure against these terrorist attacks."

But most of the hearing was devoted to denunciations of the evacuation plan, along with assertions that Indian Point poses a continuing threat to the region.

"All of our families are potentially affected by this plant," said Legislator Michael Kaplowitz, D-Somers, chairman of the environmental committee. "We used to think that time was on our side when it came to nuclear issues.

"But post-Sept. 11, we know we've lost that element of time. We have to deal with this now," he said.

Last night's hearing ended shortly after 11 p.m. Ryan and Abinanti said a second public hearing will be held in January, but no date has been set yet.

"We need a full review before we can arrive at a point when the full board may want to enact a law to decertify the plant," Ryan said.

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