

December 13, 2001

Nuclear power complex 'extremely safe,' Kallstrom says

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DATELINE: BUCHANAN, N.Y.

The Indian Point nuclear power complex is "an extremely safe place" that has long been secure and is getting even more difficult to penetrate, the state's security chief said Thursday.

"Everybody should relax about this," said James Kallstrom, director of the state Office of Public Security. "There are a lot of other issues that are of more concern."

At a news conference outside the Indian Point gates, he announced the completion of an FBI report on security. While he would not release the report or present its findings in detail, he said residents around the plant "should have the peace of mind that we have a great security plan here." Considering a few scenarios - "an overland bunch of bandits," weapons launched from across the Hudson River, an attempt to drain the pool that protects spent fuel rods, even a hijacked jet slamming into a reactor's containment dome - Kallstrom expressed confidence that Indian Point was well-protected. He even issued something of a challenge.

"What I care about is the security of this plant, the ability of a terrorist organization to take it over, and I can tell you, it's robust enough to let 'em try," Kallstrom said. "That may be one way of flushing them out."

Kallstrom's comments bucked a groundswell against the nuclear plants that has grown quickly since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Activists say that a jetliner crashing into a reactor building just 35 miles north of Times Square could contaminate much of the New York metropolitan area with radiation and that the current evacuation plan is inadequate at best.

The Westchester County Legislature scheduled a public hearing for Thursday night to hear comments about evacuation.

Kallstrom said the evacuation plan was not part of his investigation, but he insisted that most of the local officials he spoke with were satisfied. However, Linda Puglisi, the Cortlandt town supervisor, and Paul Feiner, the Greenburgh supervisor who is leading a coalition to close the plant, said Thursday that the plan is inadequate and that they had not heard from Kallstrom.

Kallstrom said the FBI had made more than 20 recommendations, most of which are being implemented.

"I'm not saying there were deficiencies," he said. "I'm saying the recommendations go to bolstering the security that was here."

Among the recommendations:

- More frequent testing of security forces. Barry Mawn, chief of the FBI's New York office, said the FBI would help train and test the security force, which currently includes National Guard troops and private guards.

- Better coordination of response plans among law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction at Indian Point, including the state, the county, the Town of Cortlandt and the village of Buchanan.

- The development of intelligence. "Hopefully we are going to be in a prevent mode as

opposed to reacting to a situation," Mawn said.

Some unspecified recommendations went to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as well, Kallstrom said, and were being taken under consideration there as part of "a re-evaluation of nuclear security nationwide."

Kallstrom said the NRC had commissioned a study on whether nuclear plants could withstand an impact like the one inflicted on each tower of the trade center. While emphasizing that he was not a physicist or a structural engineer, he said, "I don't believe a direct hit from a major commercial airplane could penetrate the containment dome here. The good news is this is one of the strongest constructed, designed containment facilities in the United States, if not the world."

He praised Entergy Corp., the plants' owner, for cooperating with the FBI study and for pledging \$3 million to implement recommendations. Entergy spokesman Jim Steets said the report was "a ringing endorsement of the security of the plant."

"People should feel safe right now," he said.