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# Pataki calls for federal review of emergency planning at nuke sites

By Jim Fitzgerald, Associated Press, 2/1/2002 18:23

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. (AP) Gov. George Pataki asked the federal government on Friday to review emergency plans for nuclear power plants, taking into account the threat of terrorism and starting with Indian Point in the New York City suburbs.

He also requested a stockpile of potassium iodide, a drug that has been shown to fight some effects of radiation poisoning.

"Everything changed on Sept. 11," the governor said at a news conference. "What was adequate Sept. 10 may not be adequate Sept. 12."

At the same time, Rep. Nita Lowey called for the decommissioning of the two Indian Point plants, saying they present "an unacceptable risk to the safety and security of the New York metropolitan area."

The Democratic congresswoman, who represents most of Westchester County, joins dozens of local officials and activists who have demanded that the plants in Buchanan be shut down at least temporarily because of the threat of an airborne terrorist attack like the one that brought down the World Trade Center. Many say the existing evacuation plan for the area around the plants is nearly useless.

Pataki, a Republican, said the Federal Emergency Management Agency had last certified emergency planning at Indian Point in 1996. He asked that the plans be "completely reassessed to see if they meet the new reality."

President Bush said Tuesday that diagrams of American nuclear power plants had been found by U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Last week, the federal government alerted nuclear plants that terrorists may be planning an attack using a hijacked commercial airliner.

Pataki said, however, "We have no specific threats, no warnings or indications against any facility or target in New York State and that includes Indian Point. They are all generic warnings."

Edward F. Jacoby Jr., director of the state Emergency Management Office, said his office was asking FEMA and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for comprehensive reviews at Indian Point 2 and 3, Nine Mile 1 and 2 near Oswego and the Ginna nuclear station near Rochester.

Pataki suggested that the review be done nationwide, but "We want them to start with Indian Point because this is the nuclear power plant in a very environmentally sensitive area but more important an area with millions of people."

The state asked the NRC for 1.2 million tablets of potassium iodide for residents around the three nuclear sites. The chemical, known as KI, has been shown to offer some protection from radiation illness, especially in children, and the NRC has been offering it to states. Pataki said the drug would be kept "in appropriate locations within the radius" of the nuclear plants.

The governor's call for a review came as the state signed off on an annual letter to FEMA stating that the counties around the nuclear plants had completed updates of their emergency plans, which include the evacuation of residents within 10 miles of the plants.

Around Indian Point, 35 miles north of midtown Manhattan, activists and some local officials had been imploring the state not to approve the evacuation plan. They say it cannot work because there are too many people and too few roads. Many find it unlikely that bus drivers assigned to take schoolchildren out of a contaminated area would really venture in, or that parents would follow instructions to stay out of the area and let the government evacuate their children.

Alex Matthiessen, who leads the Riverkeeper environmental group, said he was disappointed that Pataki had signed off on the plan but was encouraged by his request for a review.

"It's a positive sign, and I applaud him for it," Matthiessen said. "My concern is for the ability of FEMA and the NRC to conduct a truly independent review. I encourage the governor to call on them to conduct it in full view of the public."

Pataki said Tom Ridge, the homeland security chief, told him the federal review "was an excellent suggestion" and would have his office work on it. The governor said FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh "is very supportive."

On the Net:

NRC: <http://www.nrc.gov/>