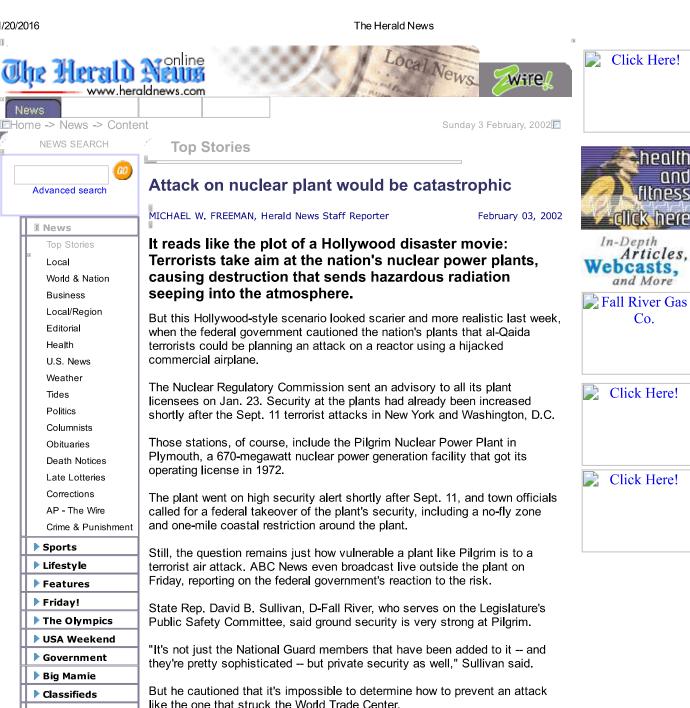
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Our Newspaper John Freeman of Fall River is a retired nuclear engineer who worked for the Administrative Boston firm of Stone & Webster, designing plants that could withstand Lifestyles

that kind of attack."

He said the on-target collision of a plane into a plant like Pilgrim would be catastrophic.

"What do you do about terrorist attacks from the air?" he asked. "I don't know

the answer to that. September 11 already demonstrated our vulnerability to

"It all depends what kind of damage took place inside," he said. "If all the piping remained intact, they could shut the plant down."

If the pipes were severed and radiation leaked out, "You would have a serious problem," he said.

However, Freeman said using a plane to take down a plant is harder than it sounds. For one thing, Pilgrim is not a large target like the World Trade

"There are no-fly zones there," he said. "You can't fly a plane, a commercial airliner, over a nuclear plant.

A commercial jet carrying thousands of pounds of fuel would have the potential to do considerable damage to the plant, he said, but added, "It would have to be a direct hit. At a nuclear plant, the container building is three and a half feet of reinforced concrete. It's not something that's easy to penetrate. If it was a direct hit -- if the nose of the jet went right into it -- it would penetrate. But it's tough to make a direct hit, since a plane can be 75 feet tall."

Sullivan said the general public should remain confident that safety officials understand the threat and are doing everything possible to minimize it.

"I think we just have to be ready, and understand these guys would go to any length to hurt this country," he said.

Dr. Richard A. Meserve, chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, spoke about this threat on Jan. 17 at the National Press Club in Washington.

While saying there have been no "specific credible threats of a terrorist

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attack on nuclear power plants," he acknowledged there was information that al-Qaida "considers nuclear facilities as potential terrorist targets."

But the plants "are not 'soft' targets," he added. "The plants are among the most formidable structures in existence and they are guarded by well-trained and well-armed security forces."

Michael W. Freeman may be reached at mfreeman@heraldnews.com.

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