

# NORTH COUNTY NEWS

January 23, 2008

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## **Indian Point's new sirens already corroded**

*By Abby Luby*

Corrosion was found on the newly installed sirens intended for notifying the public about emergencies at the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

The sirens are part a new emergency notification system not yet completed. The old siren system still remains in use as the primary notification system.

The information about the sirens' deterioration was first divulged in a bi-monthly conference call last Thursday between plant owner Entergy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), FEMA and Westchester County Emergency Services.

"We identified the corrosion during our routine preventative maintenance program," said Jim Steets of Entergy. "We checked about 35 sirens and saw the corrosion in only about two or three of the sirens."

Steets said 150 new sirens were installed about a year ago. Neil Sheehan of the NRC said that the corrosion was found on driver terminals, wire connectors and terminal strips.

"A cause [for the corrosion] was that a protective coating in the form of a gel should have been applied during installation," said Sheehan. "The lack of this gel, combined with a continuously applied DC voltage, apparently accelerated the corrosion of the driver terminals."

Sheehan noted that "repairs were being made as soon as degradation is identified."

Since last spring Entergy has missed a series of deadlines for completing the new emergency notification system. The company has been working on the new emergency notification system since 2006 but failed to meet their first proposed completion date of January 2007. The NRC granted Entergy an extension to complete the system by April 15 of last year, a date which the utility company was again unable to meet, garnering a one-time \$130,000 fine imposed by the NRC.

Last summer frequent siren tests were run in efforts to get the system approved. “We’ve recently had the sirens tested at a Georgia Tech University lab for criteria asked for by FEMA,” said Steets. “We’re confident in the siren system, but we still have to work through some of the details.”

### **New milestones set by Entergy**

In a Jan. 9 letter to FEMA, Entergy laid out a weekly schedule for what it called “milestones” towards getting the new siren system up and running. Those milestones include finishing tests on the siren’s signals by Feb. 1, replacing all older poles and sirens by March 14, inspecting all 155 siren poles, control boxes and siren heads by April 30.

Entergy also expects to notify the public about the new siren system by July 29 and expects FEMA to approve the new system by Aug. 6. FEMA has to give an official nod of assurance to the new system before the old system is taken off line.

Under the 2005 Energy Policy Act, the NRC requires nuclear power plants with certain population densities to have backup power for the facility’s emergency notification system, including sirens. The only plant in the country to meet this criterion is Indian Point, because it is located near four heavily suburban counties with a population exceeding 300,000 within 10 miles of the plant. The new siren system is expected to add coverage within the 10-mile emergency planning zone.

Entergy decided to build a new groundbreaking alarm system, considered to be the first of its kind for any nuclear power plant in the country. The new system will have two separate communications paths: radio and wireless cellular networks, and a radio activation method for sounding the sirens that are supposed to work within one to four minutes.