

# NORTH COUNTY NEWS

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## **Entergy says sirens are ready, set to go**

**By Abby Luby**



*Photo by Art Cusano*

### **Indian Point awaits FEMA's approval to implement warning system**

The new siren system that can alert 300,000 residents to an emergency at the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plants is ready to go, said plant owner Entergy Nuclear at a meeting Friday.

The only delay is being caused by a complete review of the system by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Michael Beeman, regional administrator of FEMA, said final design documents for the alert system were just received from Entergy Aug. 5.

"Our engineers are presently reviewing that documentation," Beeman said. "This is a rather voluminous amount of material we're going through."

Beeman said he didn't know if the review would be finished by Entergy's proposed completion date of Aug. 14 – the last proposed deadline for the service to be put on line.

In the last two years Entergy has missed two deadlines to replace its 156-siren system and has paid \$780,000 in fines to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The utility company was mandated by the Energy Policy Act passed in Congress in 2005 to install an emergency

alert system with backup power in case of a power black out. The system has to be able to alert residents within 10 miles of the reactors.

The new \$30 million system has 172 sirens that can be heard within the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zone in Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Orange Counties. A low-level siren sound will be heard in Harriman State Park and Bear Mountain State Park, said Entergy. Entergy's project manager, Tim Garvey, said that the new system will have 60-square-miles of additional coverage.

"The population coverage is also greater," he said. "The system will also be able to automatically verify if the sirens have worked."

About 2,500 residents in Putnam County that cannot hear the sirens will be given tone-alert Radios by November 2008. The 6-inch box radios cost \$60 and will be paid for by Entergy who will also supply AA batteries to residents once a year.

"The radios are considered 'enhancements' to the alert system," said Michael Slobodien, Entergy's director of emergency planning. "They will get a signal from WHUD, the emergency alert radio station that activates emergency signals, to counties in the Hudson Valley." The tone-alert radios are a new addition to Entergy's emergency alert system and are currently under review by FEMA.

Westchester County Emergency Services Commissioner Anthony Sutton said the county doesn't want to rush the review but said the long process is finally coming to an end.

Fred Dacimo, vice president for Entergy, said the system was robust.

"We believe this system meets and exceeds the requirements of the law," he said. "It's clear to us that this system is much better than the existing system so the question is, 'what are we waiting for?' We need to get this thing approved and in service."

Although agreeing that the system was an improvement, Sutton reminded Entergy of its inability to meet deadlines in the last two years.

"It's important that it is put into place once it is verified that it meets the design documents," he said, "but it's unfortunate that the push to service hasn't been demonstrated throughout the entire project."

Entergy said it could get the system up and running within two days after the FEMA approval. NRC Regional Administrator Sam Collins was handed a letter from Entergy just before the start of Friday's meeting stating that Entergy still hadn't received the FEMA review of the new siren system.

"It's going to be a day-by-day process," said Collins. "The commitment date [for FEMA to complete its review] is not established; there's some

uncertainty there.”

The NRC said that it will defer any decisions on future enforcement if the alert system is not operating.

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan, also present at the meeting said, “We’ll step back once they have the new system in operation and decide whether any additional enforcement action is necessary.”

The two NRC fines for Entergy were due to factors within their control, added Sheehan. “Aug.14 is a commitment date but it’s not a deadline per se,” he said.

During the public comment, Dave Lochbaum, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, asked the NRC about its approach to enforcing fines for Entergy’s missed deadlines.

“Were there lessons learned and could you have done it differently?” he asked. “Might you have done a deeper sanity check to see if what Entergy was proposing was realistic? Could you have acted more aggressively when they missed their deadlines?”

Collins said the NRC did do a self assessment when the first deadline was missed. “But our self assessments are not publicly available,” he said.

Lochbaum said that the NRC could have chosen to fine Entergy \$130,000 a day. He also said that the NRC Inspector General Hubert Bell just started an inquiry into why the NRC fined Entergy only twice for missing deadlines to complete the sirens.