

Evacuation plan near nuclear plant deemed unrealistic

■ County executives are under fire for signing off on it

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

ELMSFORD, N.Y. — County executives in the emergency zone around the Indian Point nuclear power plants ignored reality — and the wishes of many residents — when they signed off on a “flawed, unrealistic” evacuation plan, a state assemblyman said yesterday.

“The plan simply cannot be said to protect the health and safety of the people,” said Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, a Greenburgh Democrat who heads a committee examining the evacuation plan.

The long-criticized plan has attracted closer scrutiny since the attack on the World Trade Center raised the possibility of an airborne terrorist assault on the nuclear plants.

Critics say there are too many people and too few roads away from Indian Point. 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.

The two nuclear plants are in the Westchester village of Buchanan, 35 miles north of midtown Manhattan.

At a hearing last month, the president of one of the bus companies that is supposed to go into the danger zone told Brodsky's committee that the evacuation plan is “a fairy tale.”

In a unanimous vote Tuesday night, the Rockland Legislature

resolved to ask the federal government to close the power station, saying it is vulnerable to a terrorist attack and the evacuation plan isn't adequate.

“We are sending a message that the safety and the security of our residents is of the utmost importance,” said Legislator Harriet Cornell, who introduced the resolution.

More than 20 municipalities have signed similar resolutions, and the Westchester County Legislature is considering one.

The evacuation plan is a key requirement for any nuclear plant. Brodsky said that in New York, the county executives who have territory within 10 miles of the plant are asked to make sure that there is a plan in place. The state then uses those assurances in reporting its readiness to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The process had attracted little attention before Sept. 11. Now many activists, some hoping to

force the closing of the plants, are trying to prove there is no workable evacuation plan.

Brodsky and environmentalist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. had asked the county executives — Westchester's Andrew Spano, Rockland's C. Scott Vanderhoef, Putnam's Robert Bondi and Orange's Edward Diana — to talk with them before signing off.

In addition, Westchester Legislator Thomas Abinanti had asked Spano to hold off.

But the county executives agreed Tuesday to declare to the state that they have an evacuation plan designed to protect the public. In a letter to Brodsky, Spano said he believes the plan “is designed to work and adequately protects the public health and safety.”

“If you want to close down the plant, have a debate,” Spano spokeswoman Susan Tolchin said yesterday. “Don't use the response plan as a pawn in your efforts to close down the plant.”

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