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STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS  
ON  
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AROUND  
NUCLEAR POWERPLANTS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We welcome the opportunity to be here today to discuss Federal, State, and local emergency planning and preparedness for nuclear powerplant accidents. We have recently completed field work on a review of the activities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which now has the lead Federal responsibility for assuring the safety of individuals near nuclear powerplants in the event of an accident at one of those plants. Today I will discuss our tentative findings resulting from this work.

We believe that since the 1979 Three Mile Island accident, a good deal of progress has been made by Federal, State, and local authorities as well as utility companies in planning for offsite responses to powerplant emergencies. However, much remains to be done. In short we found that

--while substantial progress has been made in developing offsite preparedness plans around operating sites, concern

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remains as to whether the resources and public awareness are adequate to properly execute these plans;

--additional Federal guidance is needed to improve State and local response capabilities; and

--much remains to be done to achieve a coordinated Federal response strategy to dealing with powerplant accidents.

Before discussing the above issues, I should briefing highlight the primary changes in Federal roles and responsibilities that have taken place since 1979. In late 1979, FEMA, as the principal agency involved in emergency planning and preparedness was made responsible for coordinating and approving State and local offsite preparedness plans to respond to nuclear powerplant accidents. This responsibility was transferred from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) which retains responsibility for making onsite plant safety assessments and for approving the operation of plants. NRC considers FEMA's offsite safety assessments when it determines whether or not to allow a plant to begin or continue operating. FEMA is also responsible for coordinating the efforts of 10 Federal agencies in the development of a national contingency plan for Federal responses to nuclear powerplant accidents.

STATUS OF AND PROBLEMS IN APPROVAL  
OF OFFSITE PREPAREDNESS PLANS

By July 1983, FEMA had formally approved planning and preparedness at 18 of 53 operating sites. Similar plans were under review for the remaining operating sites. Initial preparedness exercises, using the plans and involving a variety of community organizations which would respond to an actual accident, have been conducted at all 53 sites. Follow-up exercises have occurred at

many of the sites. FEMA hopes to complete about 75 percent of the plan reviews and exercises by October 1984.

Notwithstanding this progress, FEMA has concluded that planning and preparedness are still insufficient to warrant its approval at 35 operating sites. We believe this situation exists, in part, because:

- a clear-cut method for funding the preparation and testing of State and local emergency plans has not been developed. As a result, some State and local governments have refused to participate in the preparedness process or have moved slowly in correcting deficiencies. Although most State, local, and utility officials we contacted agree that utilities should fund the costs associated with developing acceptable offsite emergency plans, they often disagree on the appropriate amount of funds to be provided.
- local communities that want to prevent or delay plants from operating are relying on their refusal to participate in the emergency planning process to achieve their objectives. Neither FEMA nor NRC has direct leverage over such communities and NRC's only influence is over utilities through its plant licensing process.

In addition, we found that FEMA's process for evaluating State and local planning and preparedness does not always provide consistent and reliable results. Its procedures for evaluating and approving State and local planning and preparedness encompass basically a two step process involving (1) reviewing plans for compliance with Federal criteria and (2) testing plans in annual exercises. Our concerns with these procedures include:

--FEMA and NRC rely on States and utilities to prepare scenarios that dictate what is to be tested in exercises. FEMA has not established minimum standards that exercises must meet and has often received scenarios too late to change the exercise scope. As a result, FEMA has concluded that although State and local performances for many exercises were adequate, the exercises themselves did not provide ample opportunity to demonstrate response capabilities.

--FEMA does not always require that all plan elements are tested, or verify that they are complying with Federal criteria. Consequently, FEMA has approved offsite safety even though compliance with many requirements has not been assessed.

--FEMA does not have followup procedures for ensuring that deficiencies from previous exercises are corrected. As a result, it has, in some instances, concluded that preparedness is adequate even though it has no evidence that deficiencies from earlier exercises have been corrected.

--FEMA does not provide State and local governments timely feedback on exercise evaluations. Therefore, State and local governments lack needed information to timely correct deficiencies. In addition, FEMA does not receive complete schedules of corrective actions taken by State and local governments to correct noted deficiencies.

FEMA officials told us that they recognize these problems exist and are initiating actions to correct most of them.

ADDITIONAL FEDERAL GUIDANCE IS  
NEEDED TO IMPROVE STATE AND LOCAL  
RESPONSE CAPABILITIES

Federal regulations, published in March 1982, charged Federal agencies having nuclear emergency responsibilities to assist FEMA in developing guidance for State and local use in preparing emergency plans. Each agency's individual assignments correspond to its principal mission and responsibilities. We found that although the agencies have progressed toward fulfilling their assignments, they have not progressed to the point where FEMA can use their input to develop specific guidance on many key preparedness factors. Also, FEMA, as the principal coordinator of the development of this guidance, needs to be more active in assuring that the agencies complete their tasks and more diligent in completing several of its own responsibilities. Specifically, our work has shown that:

- Before the public can respond to recommended protective actions, it must be alerted that an emergency exists and know how to respond. Guidance for assessing the adequacy of alert and notification systems and public education has been under development for about 3 years.
- FEMA recognizes that it needs to develop guidance describing the types of radioactive measuring instruments to be used, how to operate them, and how to interpret the results. FEMA has developed and published only a portion of required instrumentation guidance.
- Complete Environmental Protection Agency guidance stipulating the projected radiation doses that should trigger

protective actions and describing how to carry out those actions is still not available.

--Plans for training Federal, State, and local government officials have not been implemented. As a result, it is uncertain whether public officials and emergency workers will know how to best respond in a nuclear powerplant emergency.

A COORDINATED FEDERAL RESPONSE  
STRATEGY STILL NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED

According to current schedules, a Federal response plan describing the specific responsibilities of 10 Federal agencies in the event of nuclear powerplant emergencies will not be finalized and tested before 1984. Furthermore, the plan as it is currently envisioned will not fully address the deficiencies in Federal coordination identified by the Presidential and NRC commissions that studied the Three Mile Island accident. FEMA's role as a coordinator in a nuclear powerplant emergency will continue to be very limited and dependent upon voluntary cooperation of other agencies that have statutory authority to intervene in an emergency.

A draft of the Federal response plan has been partially tested. These tests have revealed coordination problems. For example, NRC did not share information with other agencies, or involve them in decisionmaking to the degree FEMA believes necessary. Other notification and communication problems also surfaced--in one case a utility was unwilling to fully cooperate with FEMA and other Federal agencies and refused them adequate communication facilities. Until a full-scale exercise of the Federal plan is held, the adequacy of Federal capability will

remain unclear. Also, without regional exercises of the plan, local Federal response personnel will not be able to identify and address weaknesses in their capabilities or ensure a satisfactory interface exists with State and local personnel.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We recognize that developing an acceptable plan for offsite response to a nuclear powerplant emergency is a long and difficult process requiring the full participation and cooperation of a myriad of Federal, State, and local organizations. Nevertheless, the potential consequences of an accident warrant an intensified effort on the part of all concerned to assure that Federal agencies, as well as States and communities containing nuclear powerplants, are adequately prepared to respond to an emergency if it should occur. We plan to make several specific recommendations to FEMA and, if appropriate to other agencies, which will be directed to the issues we have discussed today.

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Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. We will be glad to answer any questions.