



Highlights of [GAO-03-528T](#), a report to the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, emergency preparedness at nuclear power plants has become of heightened concern. Currently, 104 commercial nuclear power plants operate at 64 sites in 32 states and provide about 20 percent of the nation's electricity. In July 2001, GAO reported on emergency preparedness at the Indian Point 2 nuclear power plant in New York State (*Nuclear Regulation: Progress Made in Emergency Preparedness at Indian Point 2, but Additional Improvements Needed* [[GAO-01-605, July 30, 2001](#)]). This testimony discusses GAO's findings and recommendations in that report and the progress the plant, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have made in addressing these problems. GAO also provides its thoughts on the findings of a soon-to-be-issued report (the Witt report) on emergency preparedness at Indian Point and the Millstone nuclear power plant in Connecticut, and the implications of that report for plants nationwide.

Since 2001, the Entergy Corporation has assumed ownership of the Indian Point 2 plant from the Consolidated Edison Company of New York (ConEd).

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-528.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jim Wells at (202) 512-3841 or wellsj@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR REGULATION

Emergency Preparedness Issues at the Indian Point 2 Nuclear Power Plant

What GAO Found

In 2001, GAO reported that, over the years, NRC had identified a number of emergency preparedness weaknesses at Indian Point 2 that had gone largely uncorrected. ConEd had some corrective actions underway before a 2000 event raised the possibility of a leak of radioactively contaminated water into the environment. ConEd took other actions to address problems during this event. According to NRC, more than a year later, the plant still had problems similar to those previously identified—particularly in the pager system for activating emergency personnel. However, NRC, in commenting on a draft of GAO's report, stated that ConEd's emergency preparedness program could protect the public. Four counties responsible for responding to a radiological emergency at Indian Point 2 had, with the state and ConEd, developed a new form to better document the nature and seriousness of any radioactive release and thus avoid the confusion that occurred during the February 2000 event. Because they are the first responders in any radiological emergency, county officials wanted NRC and FEMA to communicate more with them in nonemergency situations, in addition to communicating through the states. However, NRC and FEMA primarily rely on the states to communicate with local jurisdictions.

Since GAO's 2001 report, NRC has found that emergency preparedness weaknesses have continued. For example, NRC reported that, during an emergency exercise in the fall of 2002, the facility gave out unclear information about the release of radioactive materials, which had also happened during the February 2000 event. Similarly, in terms of communicating with the surrounding jurisdictions, little has changed, according to county officials. County officials told GAO that a videoconference system—promised to ensure prompt meetings and better communication between the plant's technical representatives and the counties—had not been installed. In addition, NRC and FEMA continue to work primarily with the states in nonemergency situations. Although they note that there are avenues for public participation, none of these is exclusively for the county governments.

GAO did not evaluate the draft Witt report or verify the accuracy of its findings. The draft Witt report is a much larger, more technical assessment than the 2001 GAO report. While both reports point out difficulties in communications and planning inadequacies, the draft Witt report concludes that the current radiological response system and capabilities are not adequate to protect the public from an unacceptable dose of radiation in the event of a release from Indian Point, especially if the release is faster or larger than the release for which the programs are typically designed. GAO is aware that, in commenting on a draft of the Witt report, FEMA disagreed with some of the issues raised but said the report highlights several issues worth considering to improve emergency preparedness in the communities around Indian Point and nationwide. NRC concluded that the draft report gives "undue weight" to the impact of a terrorist attack.