

**THREE MILE ISLAND EMERGENCY
3/28/79 TO 4/9/79 - 13 DAYS
WSO HARRISBURG, PA**

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It all began with a brief telephone call. ... "I guess you know there's been an accident at TMI!" ... "No, I did not know". It was sunny, cool, and the visibility was good. I looked out the window at the TMI stacks. Everything appeared peaceful. Surely TMI was safe.

The following is a brief report on the thirteen-day period. All times are EST.

3/28/79 - Wednesday

0900 - The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) called for the wind forecast. A high pressure area centered over Pennsylvania would cause the winds to be "light and variable". Observations during the day proved this forecast to be correct.

The wind forecast given to the numerous agencies was:

"Winds light and variable this morning, becoming southeasterly 5 to 15 mph this afternoon"

1015 - The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Washington, D.C. began calling hourly for the following data:

Present weather at Capital City Airport (CXY), Harrisburg International Airport (MDT), Reading (RDG) and Lancaster (LNS).

Latest radar information.

Latest forecast.

The beginning and ending times of all precipitation that might affect TMI.

1225 - Lawrence Livermore Laboratory at the University of California began calling for the weather at CXY, MDT, RDG and LNS. These people are under contract with the Department of Energy and were determining the area that may be affected by any fallout.

By the end of the first day, representatives from the following organizations were known to have contacted the WSO in Harrisburg:

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

The Office of the Governor of Pennsylvania

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Lawrence Livermore Laboratory - University of California

Food and Drug Administration

Various News Media

Miscellaneous organizations who did not volunteer their names

3/29/79 - Thursday

Continued to provide data to the various organizations as above. PEMA began calling on an hourly basis.

We reminded PEMA of the availability of the NOAA Weather Radio System (NWR).

3/30/79 - Friday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

1000 - Heard on commercial radio: "Evacuation is possible".

1015 - Called PEMA and reminded them of the NWR.

Telephone calls to us were increasing and we were getting more concerned about the gravity of the situation.

1400 - Alerted WSOs Atlantic City, NJ, Binghamton, NY and Patuxent River, MD to monitor our area for precipitation moving toward TMI.

1630 - Heard on commercial radio "there is a risk of a melt-down during the next five days. Pregnant women and pre-school children living within 5 miles of TMI should evacuate".

1655 - Reminded PEMA of the NWR.

1703 - Called the Governor's Office and the Governor's Press Secretary and told them "The entire NWR system is at the Governor's beck and command".

3/31/79 - Saturday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

0830 - Dr. Hohannessen called to advise: Two teams of Air Force RAOB men will be setting up operations at MDT. He requested our support.

0900 - NRC and LLL requested all upper air data as soon as available.

0902 - Contacted Ray Byers, Chief, Air Traffic Control Tower, Harrisburg International Airport (MDT) and advised him of the situation. He offered his services in setting up the upper air site. He advised all officials at the MDT, offered his office for the Air Force teams and generally took care of preparations until the NWS team arrived on the scene.

1230 - Found a local motel with 10 rooms available for the Air Force. Reserved a vehicle for their use.

1315 - Patrick Duggan and Louis Giordana, WSMO, Pittsburgh, arrived at MDT and took first pibal.

1730 - NRC set up a Regional Center near TMI and advised us if we needed anything, to call them.

4/1/79 - Sunday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

0700 - Air Force took first radiosonde observation.

0845 - NRC requested we set up a wind observation network close to TMI. We tried to think of as many locations in the immediate TMI area where wind equipment was installed and made calls to enlist their help. The following were called hourly for wind information:

Hershey Airport
Brunner Island
Newville
Safe Harbor
Holtwood
The hourly sequence

Additional sites were located and put on an "if needed" basis as follows:

Peach Bottom
Dickenson College

Thomasville Airport
Klingerstown

Sometime during this day, arrangements were made to have the AF RAOB unit call LLL and the WSFO PHL with the observations.

Sometime during this weekend, Herbert Chadwick and Thomas Holmes, both from ERH, arrived at the upper air site.

4/2/79 - Monday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

2035 - PEMA asked if they could make a tape for the NWR.

2120 - PEMA representative arrived and made a tape which was to be played on NWR only if they authorized the release. The message advised all residents to listen to various EBS stations in case there is an emergency. There was no mention of the NWR on this tape.

4/3/79 - Tuesday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

MIC evacuated for a 24-hour sleep.

4/4/79 - Wednesday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

1010 - PHL requested the Harrisburg and vicinity forecast and the MDT surface observation be sent on RAWARC until further notice. Surface observation should be in plain language. Send four times a day at forecast release times.

4/5/79 - Thursday

Provided data to various organizations as above.

4/6/79 - Friday

NRC reduced hourly calls to one call every several hours.

The total telephone load getting lighter ... the emergency must be getting old.

4/7/79 - Saturday and 4/8/79 - Sunday

Almost back to a routine.

4/9/79 - Monday

1530 - Pennsylvania Governor announced "Pregnant women and pre-school children may return to their homes".

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I guess the crisis is over ... or has it just begun ...

TELEPHONE CALLS

During this 13 day period we received calls from Congressmen, radio and TV stations, newspapers and wire services for on-the-spot briefings of the weather. TV interviews from stations as far away as Milwaukee. Newspapers such as the New York Times, The Washington Post and some from Florida, North Carolina, Michigan, etc.

(It might be mentioned that the mass news media had our recently changed telephone numbers, but some NWS offices did not.)

An illustration ... from the Congressman representing the Bronx ... "tell me in plain words what the situation is ... one more question ... in your opinion, is it safe for the women in my district to walk the streets?" The obvious answer was given.

Or the call from a midwest WSFO ... "Just calling to find out how things are going. I know what you are going through because we have snow storms out here".

MISCELLANEOUS

At one time during the busiest period, two men arrived to check out a recently installed communications radio. I was informed \$30.00 was needed for crystals to enable us to get emergency messages into their "vast" system. I authorized the expenditure. I was then informed that they wanted to assign people to our office on a full-time basis to make the announcement. In no way did I need an extra body in the office asking idle questions and making lousy jokes. They said it was against the law for me to make an emergency broadcast, as I did not have a license. They departed and never returned. Is there really a law that prohibits me from making an emergency broadcast of evacuation or possibly even worse, because I do not have a piece of paper? I have a hard time believing that we would sacrifice public safety because of some law. I am looking forward to an answer to this question.

THOUGHTS THAT RAN THROUGH THE MIC'S MIND

What are all these non-NWS people doing in the office ...

I wonder how serious this is ...

I better look at the schedule ...

Post "Authorized Personnel Only" signs ...

Danny is the Assistant Fire Chief in Hampton Township. He will have to stay there to help with the evacuation ...

Bob's doctor just advised him to evacuate his daughter NOW! ...

Let's see - Art and Paul live over 20 miles away. No problem unless it blows ...

Better give all personnel my daughter's dorm telephone number. She will know where I am ...

Also give them Wassall's number ...

Get a map and draw the 5, 10, and 15 mile circles around TMI ...

The personnel on duty will be evacuated up route 322 to State College ...

My God, their families will be evacuated elsewhere ...

Phil goes to Chambersburg ...

Bob and Joe will have to go to Carlisle area ...

Don't forget the end of the month Climat data ...

I live within 7 miles of TMI. Better tell Ginny to evacuate, just in case ...

Let's try to keep some notes for the report ...

Getting helium on the weekend is almost impossible ... Maybe the ERH can take care of this ...

Where in the world do I find lead ingots ...

I better make up a final message for the NWR and NWWS ...

Should we put our name on the NWR final message so they know we had names back in the 20th Century ...

Guess I shouldn't have exceeded the speed limit coming to work today ...

Even after I told the State cop who I worked for, I got a ticket ... maybe that was why I got the ticket ...

LET'S GET READY TO EVACUATE THE FAMILY

Take only the essentials ...

A change of clothes ... how many ...

How cold does it get at this time of year in the mountains ...

I wonder how we will sleep ... or eat ... or ...

Oh, a razor ... good thing I bought those throw-aways ... 4 for 79¢ ...

Better take the plant we bought on our honeymoon ...

Forget it, it's been growing for 20 years and no way will it fit into the car ...

Ginny has only one suitcase ... she usually packs more than that to go to the shopping center ...

Better give the plants a good soaking ...

There goes that fire alarm again ... I hope it's another "mistake" ...

What about the dogs ... they are house dogs and are not allowed to roam outside ...

How long will we be gone ... a day ... a week ... a month .. or ...

Can't worry about that. I'll just fill a large basin with water and tear open a bag of dog food and hope ...

Pull all the electric plugs ...

If I'm at work, I evacuate to the State College area ... if Ginny is at home she goes to the Johnstown area ... better not tell her that ...

I wonder if we are being told the truth about this crisis ...

You really get to thinking when it gets down to what are the bare essentials. Mine were a change of clothes, toothbrush and razor, insurance policies and the family picture album.

PICTURES

There are many pictures of the elements weathermen battle, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, heavy snows and floods. I have included a picture taken from the roof of the Federal Office Building, facing in the direction of TML. Caption the picture - Fallout over Harrisburg and Vicinity.

THANKS TO:

The three surrounding radar stations who advised us continually of any precipitation approaching. With their reports and our own radar, we did a commendable job of advising the NRC, PEMA and the LLL of the timing of all precipitation. I commend the WSO Atlantic City, Binghampton and Patuxent River.

Ray Byers, Chief, ATCT, MDT of the FAA should get a special thanks for his willingness to help. His action took one big load off my shoulders during our most trying period.

The personnel at the Hershey Airport, Brunner Island, Newville, Safe Harbor and Holtwood should

be officially advised that we appreciate their actions.

Dave Zanzalari, the ever-present hydrologist MARFC, who was always willing to help and who kept me well supplied with submarine sandwiches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The personnel at this office responded to the emergency as any other NWS office would. They rose to the occasion. Therefore, I would think long and hard before I would recommend any additional "routine" drills or emergency procedures.

Pibal abilities (triple theodolite) at stations near nuclear plants would be a good idea.

Emergency Management personnel should be familiar with the coding of simple surface and upper air observations. Also, a high school knowledge of basic meteorology is highly desirable for these people.

Surface wind observation networks within a 20 mile radius.

IN CONCLUSION

The NWS did an excellent job during this potential "Disaster of the Century". I don't think any other government agency could have done better. Being operational people used to emergencies, we responded rapidly and thoroughly. There is no doubt in my mind that any NWS office in the country would have done the same thing. It has renewed my thinking that no other agency in government, whether it be federal, state or local, can surpass the quality of the people in our service.

The final ending to this story will not come for many years.

