



## 5. NUCLEAR CRISIS: Watchdog criticizes American safety standards

(E&ENews PM, 03/17/2011)

An environmental and nuclear watchdog group today criticized the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for recommending Americans in Japan remain at least 50 miles away from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, a suggestion that exceeds the official evacuation zone around American plants by 40 miles.

Edwin Lyman, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said it was "utterly unrealistic" that an effective evacuation could take place in the United States following a major disaster like the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in Japan last week.

NRC "should not be using different standards for Americans abroad than it does at home," said Lyman.

David McIntyre, an NRC spokesman, said the commission believed a 10-mile evacuation zone was still appropriate for "anticipated events" that could affect nuclear plants in the United States. Japan, however, experienced a "multiple worst-case scenario."

He said evacuation zones for American plants could be expanded beyond a 10-mile circumference if necessary, adding that the disaster in Japan might encourage NRC to reevaluate its domestic evacuation standard.

The Union of Concerned Scientists compiled a report on 14 significant events that required special inspections by federal regulators at nuclear plants last year. Most of the events involved safety issues such as roof leaks, faulty pumps and rusty pipes.

The report reveals the dangers of these "near-miss" events. In one example, a failed high-voltage power cable caused a fire at Progress Energy Inc.'s Robinson nuclear power plant in South Carolina.

"Illustrative of the unbelievably poor worker performance contributing to this near miss is this fact," said David Lochbaum, author of the report. "Hours after the fire had been put out, workers re-energized the cable that had started it all. It was still failed and ignited a second fire."

Although the report highlighted some serious failures, it covered only about 5 percent of annual plant activities. For that reason, the report notes that the agency's "spotlight is more like a strobe light, providing brief, narrow glimpses into plant condition," the report says (Tom Zeller Jr., [New York Times](#), March 17). -- PK

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