



# NUCLEAR INFORMATION AND RESOURCE SERVICE

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## NEWS FROM NIRS

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### **NRC FAILS TO DOCUMENT CLAIM MADE IN DENIAL OF NIRS' EMERGENCY PLANNING PETITION THAT "MAJORITY" OF NUCLEAR EMERGENCY DRILLS INCLUDE NATURAL DISASTER COMPONENTS**

Earlier this month, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission denied a petition for rulemaking submitted by Nuclear Information and Resource Service and 37 organizational co-petitioners that sought to increase the size of Emergency Planning Zones around nuclear reactors and improve training for emergency workers. The petition was based on lessons drawn from real-world nuclear accidents—most recently Fukushima, but also Chernobyl and Three Mile Island.

The NRC chose to ignore the real-world implications of those accidents and denied the petition in its entirety.

One component of the petition would have required every other emergency drill (i.e. once every four years) to include a scenario involving regionally-appropriate natural disasters as either initiating causes of a nuclear accident or occurring concurrently with a nuclear accident. In its denial, the NRC rejected this component, stating: "The **majority** of nuclear power plant licensees currently incorporate natural or destructive phenomena into their drill and exercise scenarios." (emphasis added).

In follow-up correspondence with NRC staff, NIRS asked for documentation of this statement. The resulting e-mail exchange, including our questions and NRC's answers, can be viewed here:

<http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/emergency/nrcnirsemailsonepzpetition.pdf>

To this question, NRC Project Manager wrote, “I cannot provide documentation for this statement because documentation is not available for many drills.” He went on to say that the basis for using the word “majority” is that “Experienced NRC inspectors have indicated that nuclear power plant licensees regularly incorporate natural or destructive phenomena into their drill and exercise scenarios.”

This hardly translates into documentation of the NRC’s assertion.

The NRC was able to link to two emergency exercises (in Arizona and North Carolina) that included an earthquake as an initiating factor, and one that included a tornado (in Maryland, where a tornado nearly did hit the Calvert Cliffs nuclear site a couple years ago).

But the agency could not provide documentation of its assertion that a “majority” of emergency exercises include a natural disaster component nor could it provide evidence that any exercises involved disruption of roads and other transportation networks—which is highly-likely to be the case in a major earthquake, ice storm, hurricane, etc. While exercises do not, in fact, involve moving real people as if in an evacuation, the result of not including such scenarios means emergency workers are not receiving adequate training to handle transportation disruption. This reality leaves emergency personnel, at the utility and state and local government levels, unprepared and thus the American people less protected than they should be.

As we stated in announcing the NRC’s denial of our petition, “The NRC has failed the American people.” This remains true; not only are NRC’s emergency exercises apparently not the majority NRC asserted, they are not providing the level of training required to handle real-world nuclear accidents. Federal legislators should take note.