

Energy Matters

[Weapons Upgrade Sought For Indian Point Guards](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

Entergy Nuclear has asked federal regulators to override New York State's weapons law to allow Indian Point guards to carry heavier weaponry on the nuclear site than standard commercial security guards.

The request comes ten years after terrorists flew a hijacked plane directly over the twin containment domes on the Hudson River en route to a suicidal dive into the World Trade Center 25 miles to the south. In the interim, Entergy and the nuclear industry have waged a two pronged effort: a public relations campaign with advertisements depicting a heavily armed, paramilitary protective force; and a lobbying campaign to dissuade the Nuclear Regulatory Commission from requiring the companies to have significantly more protection than the average commercial guard forces.

In that latter effort, the industry has been successful. While the exact armaments used by guards at particular nuclear power plants vary and are not made public, federal regulators do not require operators to have a paramilitary force capable of defending against an armed assault using rocket propelled grenades and other heavy weaponry.

And while the NRC came out with new security guidelines in 2003, these were largely

voluntary in keeping with the Bush administration's anti-regulatory policy. They were made mandatory in 2009, but Indian Point, New Jersey's Salem, Hope Creek and Oyster Creek plants, and about 60 others around the country were granted waivers so they did not have to incur immediate expenses.

The new request for heavier weapons was submitted to the NRC April 27, and asks for federal "Preemption Authority" to overrule state gun laws. NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan explained that "New York State law prohibits the possession and use of handguns, rifles, shotguns, short-barreled shotguns, short-barreled rifles, machine guns, semi-automatic assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, the possession and use of which have been determined to be necessary at Indian Point for the protection of radioactive material or other property.

"Therefore, Entergy is seeking standalone pre-emption authority to allow Indian Point security personnel to continue to possess and use the standard weapons, devices, ammunition and/or other firearms at the facility."

NRC spokeswoman Diane Screnci said "this is the first time Indian Point has applied, and there is no requirement to apply again if the request is granted."

Entergy declined to discuss whether they are currently in compliance with New York's gun laws and have little more firepower than the average shopping mall or chemical plant, or if they are currently in violation of the law.

The NRC has not rushed to grant the request. Instead, the regulatory agency sent a formal "Request for Additional Information" to the company. According to Screnci, "The September 28th letter simply informs Entergy that we need more information to complete our review, specifically, it asks Entergy to 'Describe the impact on Indian Point's current physical protection program and capabilities, including response capabilities, if the NRC were to elect not to grant stand-alone pre-emption authority to Indian Point'."

The physical security of nuclear power plants has been an ongoing issue since the 2001 attacks. Within hours of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers the NRC was steering reporters to a video the nuclear industry was circulating a doctored video of a test at the Sandia National Laboratories (<http://bit.ly/gYAXFO>) in which an A-4 fighter jet strapped to a rocket sled was rammed into a one million pound, 12-foot concrete cube at 350 miles an hour. The craft virtually disintegrated with little impression in the concrete.

The industry claimed it was a test of the ability of the nuclear reactors' containment buildings to withstand the crash of a 767, and the NRC stated that the current fleet of power plants was designed to withstand the crash of a 747. In fact, the video showed the test of

crash reconstruction software developed by the Japanese defense department for use in the simulated crash of a jet into a mountainside.

Within a day of the attacks the NRC was forced to admit that when the current fleet of 104 reactors were designed in the 1950s and early 1960s, there were no 747s and studies conducted by the Corps of Engineers for the agency and the Department of Energy found the containment buildings were not invulnerable to the impacts of wide-bodied commercial jets at speeds over 466 miles per hour (<http://bit.ly/hf6MBs>).

Entergy executives continued showing the video frequently to elected officials in New York City and the surrounding counties, repeating the false claims of its purpose.

Ultimately, the NRC agreed with the industry that protecting plants from aerial assaults was the job of the government, through increased screening of the air industry and the rapid deployment capabilities of the Air Force. It rejected calls from civic groups for anti-aircraft batteries around nuclear installations.

But concerns lingered about the ability of the guards at these plants to withstand a ground assault from concerted terrorists. The NRC ruled that on 9/11/2001 there were four separate attacks, rather than one concerted, coordinated assault and, as a result, plants needed to be able to defend against a reasonably armed team of about five intruders – not 20.

In light of this 10-year position by the industry and the regulators, the new call for permission to use heavier weaponry at Indian Point stands out. The news that Entergy is only now seeking authority to carry heavy weapons was criticized by Gary Shaw of the Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition, which is seeking to close the twin reactors. “I had no idea they would need permission to carry heavy weapons,” Shaw said. “Entergy had always given the impression that they had all the firepower they would need to protect the plant, and that proves to be another falsehood.

“Once again, the ugly reality at Indian Point is that their assurances of safety and preparedness for emergency situations prove to be unsubstantiated. Every day that plant runs is another day of risk.”