

# Preparing For The Real Thing

BY SUSAN USHER

Margaret Dennis stands calmly just inside a locker room entrance at the West Brunswick High School gym, now a shelter for residents evacuating homes and businesses within a 10-mile radius of the Brunswick Nuclear Plant. Running a handheld counter over her clothing, EMT Ronnie Hayes checks for radiation.

Dennis follows a marked route around the corner and into the decontamination chamber. She re-emerges a few minutes later for another scan; a yellow dot sticker indicates she has showered. If "clean," she'll register at the shelter, wearing a green dot; if not, a red dot and she'll go through the shower again.

A green dot; she's okay. Dennis takes her place in line at a registration table staffed by county employees. Nearby another evacuee becomes agitated; Deputy Shelton Caison physically restrains the man, then takes him away to calm down and perhaps talk to a counselor from Southeastern Mental Health Center.

If it had been a real emergency instead of CP&L's biennial readiness drill, Margaret Dennis would have been required to strip, shower and dress in fresh clothing provided by the American Red Cross or Salvation Army, while her contaminated clothing was bagged and tagged for disposal.

Instead, Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan's neighbor and always-willing "volunteer victim" walks through the admission process. All the while, state and federal evaluators watch every move made by shelter staff members and frequently stop the action to ask questions or set up an interaction, look at their watches and scribble notes.

At her place inside the "decon" room, Shallotte volunteer firefighter Sandy Roberts is almost unrecognizable, suited up in neon yellow protective gear, thick gloves extending up her arms and her face enclosed to reduce exposure from handling contaminated clothing.

In a hurricane evacuation, entire families check into a shelter together, but not so in a nuclear event evacuation. Males and females enter separate shower areas and register at different tables, and every person must be signed in separately. Because of evacuation routes, there's a chance that parents and their school-age children may register at different shelters.

At West Brunswick, in a room normally used for health occupation classes, health department personnel set up a first aid station. Other county workers start out to inventory the food supply; the school cafeteria is locked. A 4,000-watt generator is available to power emergency light-



**SHALLOTTE VOLUNTEER Firefighter Sandy Roberts waits for evacuees in the women's decontamination room, where those entering the shelter shed contaminated apparel, shower and don a change of clothing.**

ing. Volunteer "ham" radio operators set up on-site to provide alternate communications.

County Manager Wyman Yelton looks on and asks questions.

"This has involved a large part of county government all day," he says. "There are some things you don't think about until the actual situation." Case in point: the role of the agricultural extension agency in notifying and working with farmers to protect livestock from radiation exposure.

In the student parking lot outside the gym, Chief Tim Carter and fellow Shallotte volunteer firefighters wash down vehicles in a second decontamination area, using an aerial truck and handheld hoses. For the drill, a school bus and a car run through, getting a all-over hosing with water instead of the detergent-type chemicals that would be used in a real emergency.

Tuesday's "emergency" began at 5:33 a.m. when Carolina Power & Light reported an unusual event at its Brunswick Nuclear Plant at Southport. A problem with a reactor, not expected to affect the public.

Then a small airplane crashes inside the fenced security area at the

plant. It doesn't hit any buildings, but the site's security has been breached, triggering a state of alert and higher level of monitoring by state and county officials. Still no threat to the public. The pilot is transported to Doshier Memorial Hospital in Southport for treatment.

Meanwhile, inside the plant the situation grows more serious, with a steam leak identified in a reactor building. CP&L declares a site area emergency at 9:23 a.m.

At the county complex in Bolivia, the Brunswick County Emergency Operations Center is up and running, involving personnel from most county departments as they prepare to set up traffic control points, open shelters, protect the county's water supply and whatever else may be needed. The EOC activates the 34 sirens along the perimeter of a 10-mile radius of the plant to alert the public to listen to local radio and television stations for an Emergency Broadcasting System (EBS) message notifying them of a potential problem at the plant that could affect their safety.

At 10:15 a.m. a simulated evacuation of schools within the 10-mile radius occurs; in real life students from South Brunswick Middle, South Brunswick High and Southport Elementary schools would have been transported by bus to North Brunswick High School in Leland.

At 3:17 p.m. the situation at the plant escalates to a "general emergency" and EBS broadcasts another simulated message advising people in affected areas to stay indoors or evacuate, as appropriate. By 3:30 p.m. county personnel are on their way to open shelters at the two county high schools outside the warning zone.

EBS messages and officers staffing traffic points advise Oak Island residents and residents of the area west of Boiling Spring Lakes to use the West Brunswick High School shelter, and direct residents of the Southport and Boiling Spring Lakes areas out N.C. 87 and N.C. 133 to North Brunswick High School.

"It's gone well," Logan said as the close of Tuesday's exercise approached. "It's a learning experience for us. There are some things we can improve on; there's something new with every drill. There's always new technology we need to look at."

Areas for improvement next time will include better communication among members of the response team, more delegation by Logan, and the need for more participants to assist in operating the EOC. "I had one runner who was doing that and handling the status board," said Logan. "I needed two or three runners and someone full-time on the status board."

Something new and improved this year: A CP&L plant operator stationed at the EOC to communicate directly with plant officials and to translate technical information into layman's terms.

CP&L holds mandatory drills every year, and involves state and county personnel every other year. Typically Brunswick County coordinates response to the plant "emergency," consulting with the state Office of Emergency Management and CP&L. Every six years Brunswick County turns over control of the exercise at a certain point to the state agency so that it can receive credit for the exercise.

"In a real emergency," said Logan, "we wouldn't hand over control to the state unless it became some-



**CAROLYN LEWIS of the Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad scans "evacuee" Margaret Dennis for radioactivity on her arrival at the West Brunswick High School gym shelter.**

thing we couldn't handle." a formal review with state and federal evaluators was planned at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

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