Evacuation plan called ‘deficient’

By BOB ANDERSON  
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The state’s emergency plan to deal with a nuclear accident at the River Bend power plant is “seriously deficient” in a number of areas, according to objections filed by intervenors in the plant’s licensing hearings.

The plan does not provide enough school buses to handle children in some areas, assigns tasks to state agencies that the agencies don’t have statutory authority to handle and provides only the “barest, insufficient outline” of what is to be done by whom in case of an emergency, the intervenors claim.

 Officials with the state’s Nuclear Energy Division said some of the items cited will be handled by a document accompanying the emergency plan that will be much more specific about whose duty it will be to take what action. But the officials said that reading the contentions may point out areas that need to be improved in the emergency plan.

“It’s not etched in stone,” said Bill Spell, head of the nuclear office. Reading the contentions “has been a real help to us,” and will probably result in some things being worded “more clearly,” said Steve Collins, who has been reviewing the matter for that office.

One of the attorneys for the intervenors expressed displeasure Friday with the attorney general’s office for writing a

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letter to the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board saying it will not take issue with the plan.

“We feel the interests of the State of Louisiana will be better served by continuing to work cooperatively with the various other state agencies involved,” that letter says.

Doris Falkenheiner, who represents intervenors in the case, said that position is not consistent with the concept of an independent attorney general, who is not just an attorney for a state agency.

Ian Lindsey, who wrote the letter, said he feels he can be more effective by maintaining a “cooperative relationship” with the other state agency.

“I think it’s inappropriate to take an adversarial role if it can be avoided,” he said.

One of the problems cited in the contentions is that the plan counts on school buses to evacuate children from schools within a 10-mile radius of the plant in case of an accident.

In West Feliciana Parish there are not enough school buses to handle the children.

and buses have to make double loads each day for school, the intervenors maintain.

To further aggravate the problem, the drivers have families of their own to protect in an emergency and most of them have other jobs, “including agricultural pursuits,” where they would not be easily reached, according to the contentions.

There are similar problems in the other affected parishes, the intervenors maintain.

Collins said the state is going to provide for additional buses from other parishes.

Among the problems with the plan listed by the intervenors are:

- It does not establish the primary responsibilities of the various supporting organizations.
- It does not clearly demonstrate that each organization has the staff to accomplish its assigned tasks.
- It does not provide for a prompt notification system.
- There is no back-up means of contacting key personnel.
- State agencies are assigned tasks for which they have no statutory authority.
- The plan does not provide for the difficulties of evacuating the penal institution and the state hospital at Jackson.
- There is no reasonable assurance that the aged, crippled and sick will be adequately protected.
- The agriculture department does not have proper facilities to identify and take control of contaminated agricultural products.
- The plan gives responsibilities to the East Baton Rouge Metropolitan Council that it does not have the legal authority to handle.

Collins said the intervenors apparently want the plan to be much more specific than is required by law.

The procedural manual, which should be finished before the plant goes on line, would satisfy many of the questions, he said.

Spell said his legal staff is looking into the questions about authority of various agencies to do the tasks assigned to them, and it may be necessary to have legislation passed to take care of some of those problems.

The private intervenors in the case are the Louisiana Consumer’s League, Louisianians for Safe Energy, and Gretchen Reineche Rothschild.