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Description
A leak at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania sends radioactive steam into the air. Three NBC News reports look at the possible radioactive danger to the employees of the plant, how a neighboring community is reacting, and evidence that the plant has had some mechanical issues in the past.

Keywords
DAVID BRINKLEY, anchor:
Good evening. In a nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania the cooling system broke down this morning. Some radioactive steam escaped into the air, radiation passed through the four-foot concrete walls and was detected a mile away from the plant. Federal agents said the reactor’s core may have been damaged, radiation inside the plant was a thousand times normal. But those outside were said to be in no danger. The plant is shut down. Here are three reports.

GERALD HARRINGTON, reporting:
It was shortly after four this morning at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant, when a valve and a water pump that cools the number two reactor, blew out. The blowout triggered an automatic shutdown of the system, but before the plant was sealed, some radioactive steam escaped into the air. Officials said none of the 50 or so employees at the plant was seriously exposed, and when they declared a general emergency, it was simply playing it by the rules.

JACK HERBEIN (V.P., Metropolitan Edison): We do have our crews out. We’re monitoring at for airborne contamination. The amount we found is minimal.

Unidentified Reporter: I understand that some of the workers did get some radiation?

HARRINGTON: I’m sure that some of them some got exposure but I’m positive that no one was over-exposed.

HARRINGTON: At an earlier Harrisburg news conference, state nuclear engineer William Dornsife was
asked how people would be affected by the radiation exposure.

WILLIAM DORNSIFE (State Nuclear Engineer): Well the only way it will show up will probably be in milk. There’ll be small increases in radioactive iodine in the milk because there is an accumulation factor in the milk just like there was during the fallout incident a couple years ago.

HARRINGTON: At the Three Mile nuclear plant, police and some company employees were given pocket dosimeters to monitor radiation. Some radiation was detected as far as a mile away from the plant. Plant worker Dale Reid says this was the first accident he’s witnessed in his three years here, but that he’s not afraid.

DALE REID (Utility Employee): I feel very safe work around in here. Really. If I wouldn’t, I would not be in here.

HARRINGTON: Officials will continue to monitor radiation levels here, but there’s no word yet on when the plant will reopen. Gerald Harrington, NBC NEWS, at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant outside, Harrisburg Pennsylvania.

STEVE DELANEY, reporting:

The people who live closest to the plant are right across the river in Goldsboro. About 500 people live here in comfortable old nineteenth-century houses. Nobody official told them anything was wrong until the middle of this morning. But nobody had to tell William Whittock. He lives on the river and the noise woke him up.

WILLIAM WHITTOCK: I looked out and I could see there were lights over there, a column of steam that was rushing up in the air with a tremendous noise. That’s how I became aware of it.

DELANEY: You told me that you think you can taste radiation in the air.

WHITTOCK: Well, I can taste a metallic taste. Yes, I can. And since we’ve lived here we noticed that there’s a decrease in the wildlife in this area here.

DELANEY: The people of Goldsboro don’t seem to know whether the nuclear power plant is more beneficial or dangerous. Some are scared, some are not.

Unidentified Woman 1: Well, I’m not scared. And I’m not scared of that over there.

DELANEY: Well you’ve live with it for a long time haven’t you?

Unidentified Woman 1: Yes.

DELANEY: Haven’t you ever been afraid something might happen over there?

Unidentified Woman 1: NO

Unidentified Woman 2: Yes, I am.

DELANEY: Are you?

Unidentified Woman 2: I’m scared.

Unidentified Woman 1: Well, I’m not.

Unidentified Woman 2: Now, I know you ain’t.

Unidentified Woman 1: What’s to be scared of?

Unidentified Woman 2: I’m nervous.

Unidentified Woman 1: If my time’s up to get out, I’ll get out.

Unidentified Woman 2: Well I don’t feel that way.
Unidentified Woman 1: It’s the way I feel.
DELANEY: You think it’s going to be alright, though?
Unidentified Woman 1: Sure.
DELANEY: And you don’t?
Unidentified Woman 1: She’s my neighbor, she gets upset. Well, they aren’t only going to have us, Mabel. If they go up, it’s going to take more than just us, so why worry about it?
DELANEY: This village is not out of danger, but the people who live here don’t seem to know what they can do to make the danger any less. Steve Delaney, NBC NEWS, Goldsboro, Pennsylvania.
CAROLE SIMPSON, reporting:
The Critical Mass Energy Project is a Ralph Nader group opposed to nuclear energy. The staff says the Three Mile Island reactor has been plagued with safety problems since it opened one year ago today. The evidence is in government documents. The so-called gray books, issued monthly by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which detail inspections of all 72 licensed reactors. Reports show that the plant was shut down for five months last year, “for replacement of main steam safety valves and modification of associated discharge piping.” And last month’s report states that the plant was closed for two weeks in January, after a routine test in which “both atmospheric relief valve discharge piping bellows ruptured.”
Richard Pollock, director of the project.
RICHARD POLLOCK (Director, Mass Critical Energy Project): This plant should have been a red flag to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that something was terribly wrong. And for some reason, NRC looked, but they decided not to see, so to speak. And they took no action against this plant.
SIMPSON: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said its scientists are investigating, but did not say why it permitted the plant to continue to operate. Carole Simpson, NBC NEWS, Washington.