Return Guide for Emergency Managers

"Return" is the reoccupation of areas for unrestricted residence, or resumed use, by previously evacuated or relocated populations and businesses.

Protective Action Guidelines (PAGs)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established PAGs for deposited radioactive materials. It must be determined the cumulative exposure will be less than these levels before return to previously evacuated or relocated areas can be considered:

- **First-year exposure:** 2 rem total effective dose equivalent or higher (TEDE – the whole body internal and external dose).
- **Any single year following the first year:** 0.5 rem TEDE or higher.

Basis for Return

Return may be considered in one of the following scenarios:

- A release from the plant did not deposit radioactivity or travel over areas that were initially evacuated.
- Radioactivity was deposited in areas that were evacuated or relocated. Since then, remediation efforts and natural radioactive decay have brought levels low enough for inhabitants to return and reoccupy the area.

Implementation Considerations for Return

The following guidance may be used to develop an initial return implementation plan:

- The timing of the return must be coordinated between the state and local jurisdictions (county, state).
- If this area is adjacent to a restricted zone, traffic control points and new restricted-zone borders must be established before the general population is allowed to return (county, State Patrol).
- Will the agricultural control zone in the return area be lifted? Though safe occupancy is indicated, will specific food controls/restrictions need to remain in place (state)?
- State agencies will identify vital services that need to be restored or extra services that are needed, e.g., water, gas, electric, refuse removal (especially of spoiled foods) and food distribution (state).
- Media releases relating to the return must be coordinated with the joint information center (JIC) (county, state).

Discussion Questions for Return

- Who authorizes return?
- What areas can people return to and when?
- Are there areas that people can return to immediately?
- What areas have long-term restrictions on use?
- What precautions will people be asked to take when returning?
- How will special populations return?
- How do you communicate with the evacuees who may be scattered throughout the state or country about return issues?
- What if people are too afraid and refuse to return?
- Will it be necessary to do the return in stages, or can they all come back at once?
- What are allowable radiation levels for return?

This fact sheet is designed to augment planning for an emergency response to an incident at a nuclear generating plant; it does not supersede any plans, procedures or guidelines currently in use.