

Subtopic Exploration Sheet Sample

Crisis: Nuclear Meltdown

The event of a Nuclear Meltdown transpired within the State of New Jersey would generate severe disruptions across our region in addition to new challenges that New Jersey is not accustomed to facing. An incident such as this could result in dangerous levels of radiation, thus damaging the health and safety of the public throughout the entire state. Although the chance of an incident is slight, knowing how to react during an emergency can reduce the risk of injury to the nearby population, the environment, and the power plant machinery as well. In addition, well-formed communication between all those involved in the development of nuclear energy is a crucial prerequisite for achieving best synergies and therefore highest levels of nuclear safety. However, when viewing the crisis as a whole, the three most prominent issues to address would be further spreading awareness and increasing our state's ability to provide emergency assistance to our people in the event of an emergency, strengthening the effectiveness of state regulatory bodies, and further undertaking assessments of the safety vulnerabilities of nuclear power plants in the light of lessons learned from previous nuclear accidents.

In the event of any emergency such as this, what will mean the difference between widespread disaster and limited injury is the regions ability to quickly and efficiently bring emergency assistance to areas in trouble. In order to further strengthen emergency preparedness and response to our people, the NJ state government should follow the example of the organization International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which strives to provide a strong, sustainable global nuclear safety and security framework. By keeping in mind the regulations currently used and proven successful in such a well respected agency, the state of New Jersey would follow in their footsteps and ensure greater protection of our people and the environment from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. In addition, in order to further strengthen our state's ability to react in the time of an emergency, greater funding should be appropriated to the Hazardous Materials Response Unit through the Hazardous Materials Emergency Planning Grant program (HMEP). This response unit should also be consistently reviewed and improved with the increased funding to assure its ability to handle and execute actions necessary to properly deal with disasters in our state, specifically a Nuclear meltdown. In addition to simply providing emergency response, The State of New Jersey should increase awareness within the nuclear power companies themselves by inviting the IAEA to hold workshops in our state that advocate their approach of strong 'cradle to grave' control of radioactive sources. Very similar to the successful workshop the IAEA held in Vienna, officials of the organization would share with New Jersey companies their best practices on establishing robust and comprehensive control systems for the safe and secure management of radioactive sources, including their disposal. To ensure the cooperation of the nuclear power businesses and companies, the state of New Jersey

would make their attendance at the IAEA workshops mandatory in order to acquire their original charter.

Equally as important as emergency assistance in the event of nuclear meltdown is the reformation of state regulatory bodies to ensure their effectiveness and success in preventing this disaster from occurring in the first place. One of the best ways of accomplishing this is by mandating that the nuclear power companies in the state of New Jersey retain their power plants in regards to the standards of the IAEA. In order to assure their cooperation, the state government will create a committee within the NJ Department of Environmental Protection with sole purpose of assessing the safety and effectiveness of each given power plant in New Jersey by noting and comparing the state of the power plants to the IAEA standards. If this committee discovers flaws, or companies that retain their nuclear power plants at conditions not up to required standards by the IAEA, the group can forward this information to the New Jersey State Government, and deny the company a renewed charter until they comply with IAEA standards. This will allow the state to gain a strong control of the standards of local nuclear power safety, which is so essential to increasing our use of such an efficient energy source, while still assuring the safety of our citizens past simply relying on the good will of the companies to follow regulation.

One of the best ways to improve the levels of safety in which we cultivate Nuclear Energy, in turn working to avoid a nuclear meltdown, is by learning from the accidents of nuclear power plants in the past. If we accumulate the lessons learned from each given accident, and place all of that newfound knowledge into the creation of power plants that address the causes for the previous accidents, it will result in rapid advancements to power plants of exceptionally strong efficiency and functionality. This reasoning for this comes from the idea that every problem we resolve in our power plants, there is one less reason for a nuclear meltdown to occur. As a state, we can use the research done by organizations like the National Research Council in regards to previous nuclear power accidents to, in turn, draw conclusions on ways to improve the safety and security of nuclear plants in our region. For example, by evaluating the lessons learned from the nuclear accident in Fukushima, Japan, we can draw conclusions on ways to improve commercial nuclear plant safety and security regulations, including processes for identifying and applying design basis events for accidents and terrorist attacks to existing nuclear plants. We will have the NJ Department of Environmental Protection additionally be responsible for drawing this research and conclusions as to how we can use the information to increase the safety of our plants. Once the information has been gathered, and assessments of the safety features of the plants in our region have been made, this committee will be responsible for meeting with the companies in our area and discussing their findings, and encouraging companies to incorporate new ways of improving safety into their designs. This

committee will also be given the option to submit findings to the IAEA so they could further review the conclusions and even add it to their standards.

The three topics above embody the most important issues that would need to be addressed in the preparation and event of a nuclear meltdown. The most effective way to prevent such a crisis from even occurring would be to further strengthen our state's ability to oversee the safety of regional power plants. We could accomplish this by mandating that the nuclear power companies in our state retain their power plants in regards to the standards of the IAEA, and the creation of a committee designated to overseeing their compliance. The State of New Jersey should work to improve the overall safety of the nuclear power plants by assigning the NJ department of Environmental Protection to review past nuclear accidents, gather lessons that we could use to improve our own safety regulations, and further sit down with company management in our region to discuss implementation of these safety features. To ensure the most efficient emergency response in the event of an actual crisis, more funding will be allocated to the Hazardous Materials Response Unit through the Hazardous Materials Emergency Planning Grant program (HMEP), and the IAEA should be invited to host workshops in our state for the Nuclear Power companies and businesses that advocate their approach of strong 'cradle to grave' control of radioactive source. By addressing the three topics described above, the state of New Jersey would be taking meticulous care to address the means of response, the prevention, and the improvement in regards to a Nuclear Meltdown, which are all aspects necessary that our government covers in order to formulate a comprehensive approach to dealing with a Nuclear Meltdown.

Crisis: Prison Reform

The United States as whole is wasting billions of dollars “warehousing” low-level offenders, and it leads us to believe that the United State’s tendency to mass incarcerate represents an ever-growing problem and expenditure while failing to produce results in reaching any beneficial outcome. The best way to bring about the most efficient Prison Reform, in turn reaping the most impactful benefits for the State of New Jersey, would be to direct our states goals towards providing more drug treatment, ending mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, decriminalizing marijuana, increasing funding for prisoner reentry programs, and bringing an end to for-profit, private prisons in the State of New Jersey. The accomplishment of any one of these goals would result in the decrease of people incarcerated for illegitimate reasons, which should be our main goal towards addressing and working to resolve one of the largest problems of modern day America. However, Knowing that all of these goals require large, well-thought out action plans in order to efficiently reach a successful outcome, the three most important goals to focus on would be decreasing our state’s reliance on for-profit, private prisons, increasing the funding for felon-re entry programs, and eliminating the mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders.

In order to truly see impactful prison reform occur within the State of New Jersey, we must immediately turn our attention to the use of for-profit, private prisons. The Private Prison’s system places a heavy dependence on ensuring a large prison population to maintain profits and provide an incentive for government officials to place more people in prison. With the firm’s focus directly on incarcerating greater amounts of people instead of helping those incarcerated better themselves and make a new life, the State of New Jersey must come to realize that private prisons are not carrying out their most basic reason for creation: Devotion to the overall improvement of the lives of felons, and should therefore be used less frequently. The best way to do this would be to shift the majority of incarcerated citizens from private prisons to public, government run prisons, therefore removing the private prison’s means of reaching a profit which would often draw more incarcerated people into prison. In addition, Many organizations are forming to expose private prisons as the politicized, detrimental corporation that they truly function as. Any collaborative effort between the New Jersey State Government and these successful organizations will be the only way to spread awareness to our citizens of the negative impacts of prison privatization, and effectively decrease our state’s reliance on this corrupt form of imprisonment.

Halfway houses, minimum wage job training, and other forms of re-entry programs have been used to further encourage a former felons desire to re enter the US workforce and become a contributing member in society. Although all of these options do exist throughout the country,

rarely are they funded adequately enough to significantly benefit the amount of former felons released back into society and their success in the workforce. By increasing the funding for these Halfway Houses and other residential treatment facilities, the state of New Jersey would encourage programs where education, work release, substance-abuse programs, along with a variety of other courses will work to lower recidivism in felons, set them up for success in the US workforce, and over time lower the amount of lower-level offenders in the state and private prison systems. Governor Chris Christie has already begun to appropriate funding towards the improvement and creation of more halfway house programs in our region, and even further includes suggestions of efforts to relocate funding targeted for state-prison beds to halfway-house beds instead. In addition, a 1994 Federal Bureau of Prisons study found that the more educational programs successfully completed for each six months confined, the lower the rate of repeat offenses. Given that mass incarceration is a widespread issue today nationwide, seeing that these halfway houses provide means of eliminating this issue gives more incentive to allocate the funding toward such a cause. To add on, there are compelling financial reasons for moving inmates out of prison. While it costs about \$49,000 a year to house and feed an inmate in state prison, it costs only about \$30,000 to keep them in a halfway house—largely because of savings on personnel. One problem seen with these halfway houses is the lack of supervision, even with only the well behaved felons who are permitted to attend such treatment facilities. With an increase of funding, more advanced security technology and employees can be brought in to strengthen this aspect of the facilities until it is no longer considered a problem.

Since Congress created mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes in the 1980s, the federal prison population has grown from 24,000 prisoners to over 214,000 prisoners – the largest prison system in the country. In addition, with 2.3 million people behind bars, we reach a number of incarcerated persons higher than any other country in the world. With nearly half of all these prisoners serving prison sentences for drugs, and over half of all convicted federal drug offenders having little or no criminal record otherwise, an immediate problem in the incarceration of nonviolent drug offenders, and its effect on the rapidly increasing numbers of people in prison, is brought to the attention of the state of New Jersey. The mandatory minimum sentences are being to take in felons that have not necessarily committed a crime worthy of spending copious time in jail. With the number of incarcerated persons the highest in the world, we need to take measures to reduce that number. If nearly half of us prisoners serving prison sentences for nonviolent drug use, removing the minimum sentence for non-violent drug offenders would in a sense cut the amount of people incarcerated in NJ alone in half, which would in turn work to eliminate New Jersey's overreaching problem of overcrowding.

The issues mentioned previously constitute the most prominent concerns of Prison Reform in present times. With the overlying goal being to decrease the number of incarcerated people within our state, bringing an end to for-profit, private prisons would eliminate their incentive to continuously fill the prisons to max capacity of people in order to receive more

money for themselves. By increasing the funds granted to reentry programs, the amount of money needed to house felons in New Jersey would decrease as more are relocated to residential treatment facilities, and more felons would re enter the US workforce with a foundation allowing them to become successful and not resort back to a life of crime. Finally, by eliminating the mandatory minimum sentence requirement for nonviolent drug offenders, the New Jersey prison system would no longer unnecessarily incarcerate felons with little to no criminal record other than a nonviolent drug offense, and the overall numbers of people in prison would decrease substantially.

Citations:

Topic 1:

BP 1: Body: Emergency Assistance during emergency and spread of awareness

(<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/actionplanns.pdf>)

BP 2: Body: Strengthen effectiveness of state regulatory bodies

<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/actionplanns.pdf>)

BP 3: Body: Undertake assessments of safety vulnerabilities using lessons learned from previous accidents (<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/actionplanns.pdf>)

Conclusion Paragraph:

<http://www.preparede.org/home/nuclear-accident>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Containment_building

Topic 2:

BP 1: Body: Bring end to for-profit, private prisons (

http://www.salon.com/2013/09/23/6_shocking_revelations_about_how_private_prisons_make_money_partner/) turning private prisons over to non-profit prisons like CURE (

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/05/nonprofit-prison_n_5769194.html) or state owned facilities

BP 2: Body: Increase funding for re-entry programs (

<http://njmonthly.com/articles/lifestyle/ready-for-re-entry.html>)

BP 3: Body: Eliminate the mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenders

(http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/08/cory_booker_calls_for_widespread_prison_reform_on_anniversary_of_march_on_washington.html) (<http://famm.org/the-facts-with-sources/>)