

## Chronology of Events

### U. S. Postal Service Reaction to the Events Following the Nuclear Accident at Three Mile Island

Friday

March 30, 1979

0900 Hours

Postmaster of Harrisburg received first indication of a problem at Three Mile island via a commercial radio news broadcast.

Control points immediately established between local Postal officials and the Susquehanna District. Communications maintained and actions coordinated throughout the emergency.

The Safety Officer located three radiological meters, and a postal employee who is a trained radiological monitor was instructed to take readings every hour.

0930

Harrisburg Post Office identified all post offices within a five-mile radius of Three Mile Island for possible emergency action.

0940

Harrisburg Post Office instructed Postmasters of Middletown and Highspire to obey local authorities and to have carriers return to the Post Office.

The Postal Inspection Service contacted the Civil Defense Preparedness Agency who suggested we stay tuned to the radio.

1000

Telephone circuits overloaded. Postmaster of Harrisburg contacted State Police who were not releasing any information. Police suggested the Postmaster listen to the radio for reports from the Governor's Office.

1042

First radiological reading at the Harrisburg Post Office showed .02 millirem per hour.

1050

Federal Square Station in downtown Harrisburg was instructed to obey instructions from local authorities. If instructed to evacuate the building, postal employees were to report to the Main Post Office. There was no evacuation.

8003210293

1050 (cont'd)

NRC Spokesman E. C. McCade reported in a radio news broadcast: "As far as I know, the NRC is not recommending evacuation at the present time. Commissioner Henry is evaluating the situation right now, and the levels we have seen here have not made us to come to any conclusion that evacuation is necessary or warranted. A more detailed explanation is expected shortly."

Detective Don Foreman of the Middletown Police reported on radio: "The Three Mile Island nuclear facility emergency instructions is for a 'take cover' alert only, repeat, take cover alert only. Remain indoors, close all windows and doors, turn off fans and air conditioning. Tune to your local radio or television station to await further instructions."

Management officials toured the Harrisburg Main Post Office in an attempt to end rumors and clarify conflicting radio reports. Local union officials were contacted and kept informed.

The Safety Officer was instructed to monitor radiation levels and -- if levels started to increase -- to order a shutdown of the ventilating system.

The Harrisburg Management Sectional Center contacted all post offices within a nine-mile radius of Three Mile Island by telephone and advised: "We are watching the Three Mile Island situation and are working closely with public officials. Please notify this office, immediately, if you are contacted by local officials and instructed to curtail operations in any way. Do not take any actions unless requested by local officials or this office."

1100

The Harrisburg airport was closed.

1130

Radiological reading at the Harrisburg Post Office showed .15 millirem per hour.

1200 Highspire carrier.. went back on the street to deliver mail. Middletown carriers allowed to go home and instructed to report back in the morning.

1205 The Postmaster of Elizabethtown reported that city carriers had returned to the office, but that he could not contact his rural carriers. He was told to instruct carriers to report back in the morning as usual.

1215 A radio news report quoted the Superintendent of the Middletown School District as saying that children were being kept indoors, but that it was business as usual in the schools. Parents could take their children home, if they desired, but that schools would be dismissed at regular time.

Saturday, March 31, 1979

The Sectional Center Manager reviewed the staffing at the post offices in Harrisburg, Elizabethtown, Middletown and Highspire. While absenteeism was high, all delivery routes were covered except one rural route in Middletown.

Instructions reiterated to continue radiological monitoring at the Harrisburg Post Office.

2030 Plans made to participate in a meeting of federal agencies scheduled for the following morning at the State Capitol.

2100 A postal vehicle inventory was updated to assist in planning for possible evacuation.

Sunday, April 1, 1979  
1000

The Sectional Center Director of Customer Services and two Postal Inspectors participated in a preliminary Contingency Planning Meeting for representatives of Federal Agencies in the area of Three Mile Island. The meeting was hosted by The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (formerly Civil Defense), and locally-available federal resources were reviewed.

1000 (cont'd)

The Postmaster of Harrisburg was on duty at the Main Post Office. He and the Manager of Plant Maintenance developed and put into motion plans to secure the building in the event it was necessary to evacuate. Under normal conditions, this building is always manned and never completely closed.

1200

Contact was established with field office representatives of the American Red Cross to ease the Postal Service task of locating evacuees and forwarding mail to them.

Contact was made with officials of the Department of Health Education and Welfare to seek emergency release for delivery of Social Security checks already in the post office but scheduled for delivery on or after April 3. Postal officials felt that this would ease the workload of local post offices and provide much needed funds for evacuees. This was not authorized.

1300

The Sectional Center Director of Customer Services and two Postal Inspectors visited the Civil Defense office of Dauphin County. There was a "war room" atmosphere. Plans for large-scale evacuation had been developed, and an evacuation order was expected at any moment. Consideration was being given to the evacuation of two hospitals.

A meeting was held in the Postmaster's office with management staff and postal inspectors to review events and plans. Contingency plans were outlined and preparation made for their finalization. Local officials were placed on 24-hour call.

Monday, April 2, 1979

Postal functions extremely difficult to perform, but all basic postal services provided throughout the area. Absenteeism among postal employees was at its highest, running over 20% in Harrisburg.

Monday, April 2 (cont'd)

Voluntary evacuations in communities immediately surrounding Three Mile Island ran from 25% to almost 90% of the population.

The Postmaster and Director of Customer Services met with union officials and letter carriers to assure them that constant contact was being maintained with proper authorities and that employee safety was the first consideration during the emergency.

Radiological readings were continued throughout the day, and radios were constantly monitored.

The Director of Customer Services and a Postal Inspector attended a second meeting of Federal Agencies at the State Capitol. The PA Emergency Management Agency reported that 50% of the population that lived within the five miles of Three Mile Island had voluntarily evacuated. Plans were discussed for a total evacuation of the area up to a 20-mile radius.

Tuesday, April 3, 1979

Contingency Plans finalized for Radiological Evacuation. These plans include provisions for safety of postal employees, security of mail and facilities, and restoration of service following the emergency.

An emergency Notice to Carriers was developed to provide specific instructions for a carrier to follow if an emergency develops while he or she is delivering mail. These instructions were given to all city and rural carriers within a ten-mile radius of Three Mile Island.

ABSENCE STATISTICS

CLERK/MAILHANDLER

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOUR 1</u>	<u>TOUR 2</u>	<u>TOUR 3</u>
March 30, 1979	9.5%	7.8%	20.1%
March 31, 1979	24.7%	14%	26%
April 1, 1979	17.0%	12.1%	22.3%
April 2, 1979	25.6%	12.5%	26%
April 3, 1979	19.5%	10.7%	20%
April 4, 1979	13.5%	11.2%	15.6%
April 5, 1979	16.4%		

CARRIERS

<u>DATE</u>	<u>% OF ABSENCE</u>
March 30, 1979	9%
March 31, 1979	11.4%
April 2, 1979	20.1%
April 3, 1979	14.2%
April 4, 1979	14.2%

## NOTICE TO CARRIERS

While there is no immediate danger, the following instructions have been developed to protect the safety and health of all city and rural carriers in the event that a radiological situation develops.

### I. In case of an immediate emergency.

- A. If you are on your route and you hear a Civil Defense emergency warning signal (usually a steady blast for three to five minutes), you are directed to return to the post office immediately for further instructions.
- B. If you have a radio in your vehicle and hear of an immediate evacuation, you are to return to the post office for further instructions.
- C. If a police officer or properly identified Civil Defense Official orders you off the street, you are to return immediately to the post office for further instructions.
- D. If a customer to whom you are delivering mail advises you that an immediate evacuation has been announced by radio, you are to return immediately to the post office for further instructions.
- E. If any of the above occurs and you are unable to return to the post office because of traffic snarls, road blocks, etc., you may proceed to safety, maintaining security of all mail and accountable items.

If this occurs, you must report to the nearest post office at your earliest opportunity for further instructions.

### II. In case of an announced planned evacuation, all citizens will be advised by radio, police officials, and Civil Defense Officials of the extent and timetable for an evacuation.

- A. If you are on your route and you learn of an evacuation to begin one hour after completion of your tour of duty (or later), you are to complete your route as quickly as possible, return to the post office for immediate dismissal.
- B. If you learn of a planned evacuation of either your area of delivery or your residence, which is scheduled to begin one hour after the completion of your tour (or earlier), you are to immediately return to the post office for further instructions.

II. Continued

- C. If you are unable to return to the post office because of traffic, road blocks, etc., you are to proceed as in I.(E) of the foregoing.

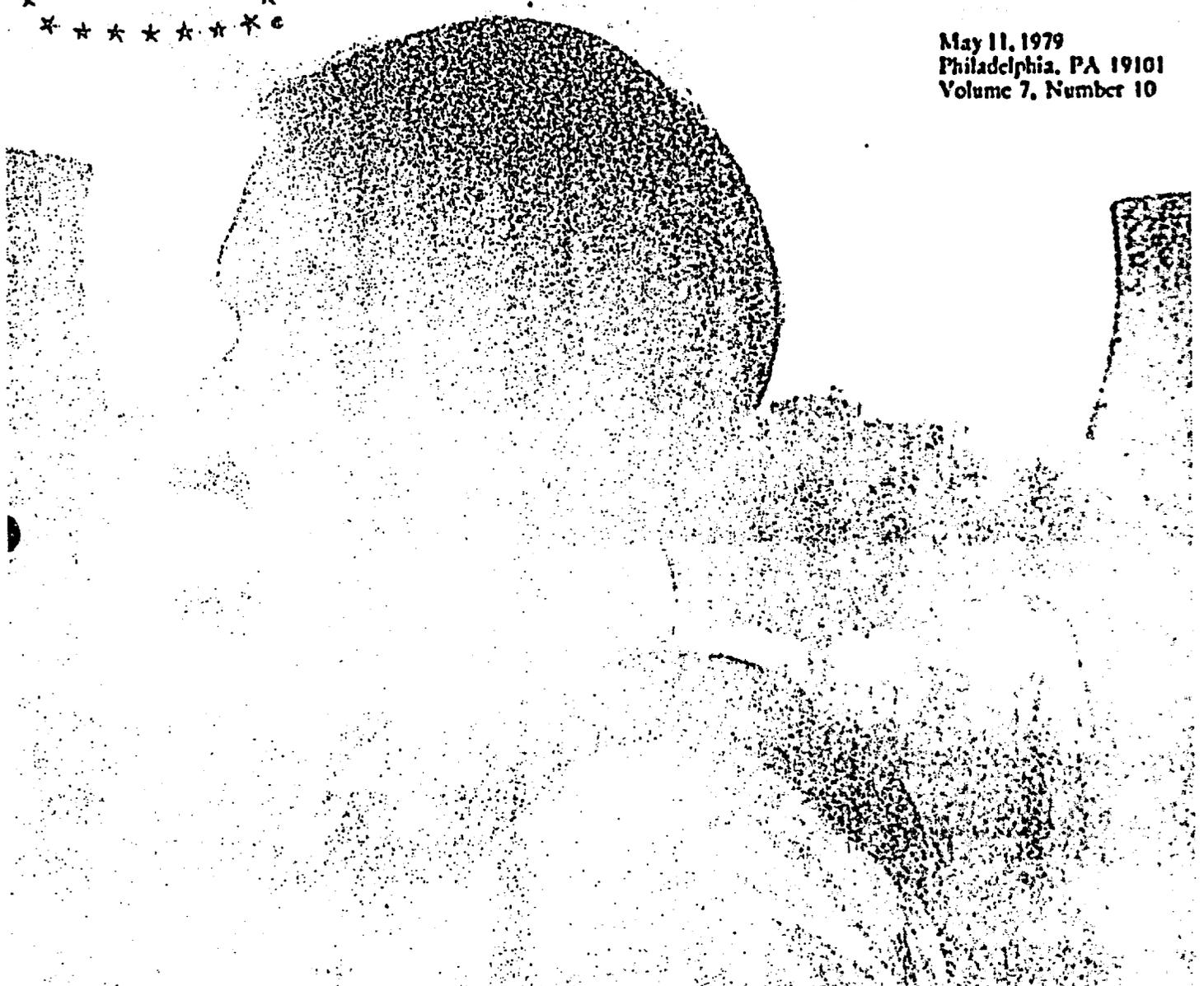
Please be assured that the first priority of the Postal Service in case of any emergency or National disaster is the safety and health of its employees. You will be provided every opportunity to seek safety and shelter for yourself and your loved ones.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
\* \* \* \* \*



# EASTERN REGIONAL BULLETIN

May 11, 1979  
Philadelphia, PA 19101  
Volume 7, Number 10



AT  
THE  
MIDDLE  
ISLAND

THE  
MAIL  
WENT  
THROUGH

# Mail Moved Despite Accident In

"Stay out of the air."

That was the message that the state police sent to Middletown Postmaster James Miller via carrier Ken Kinsey on March 30, 1979.

About 80% of the mail was delivered in the Middletown area that Friday when the accident at Three Mile Island was found to be the most serious nuclear power plant accident in the nation's history.

But troubles at TMI did not stop the mail.

Miller, postmaster of the largest office within the critical five-mile radius from TMI, promptly ordered his 20 carriers off the streets. At 9:30 a.m., he sent out the carriers in his office to retrieve those who had not heard the news: an outdoor ban had been placed on York and Dauphin counties by State Civil Defense.

In 20 minutes, all of the carriers were safely in the post office.

"Then I got in touch with Mr. Netznik (Harrisburg Sectional Center Manager/Postmaster) and informed him of what precautions had been taken," explained Miller.

Among those precautions was the decision to hold the mail of any resident who so requested by phone. Normally, mail hold requests are done in person. This Friday would be an exception.



Middletown, PA Postmaster James Miller acted quickly to ensure the safety of his employees in the recent accident at Three Mile Island.

By the third of April, 3000 of 6700 possible deliveries had requested mail holds. Miller said he received calls from residents who had travelled to California, Georgia, the Carolinas, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Similar requests were being made in the other three post offices in the TMI

area: Highspire, on the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River, and Litter (Goldsboro) and York Haven on the western shore.

Many residents of the area are senior citizens. They were expecting social security checks on the third of April. Mail theft in this area—where more than 25% of the population has left—was a definite possibility.

But postmasters took the initiative in instances where residents had not requested mail holds. When carrier saw that mail was piling up, they brought it back to the post office where it remained safely stored.

"Even the looters were scared this time," noted Mark Perry, a Highspire part-time flexible clerk.

Looting did not become a problem in the area and, by April 4, check from all four offices were delivered.

The looters were scared, but the letter carriers were not. They stayed

"Even the looters were scared this time."

Mark Perry  
Part-time flexible clerk  
Highspire, PA

and did their jobs when nobody would have blamed them had they opted for personal safety.

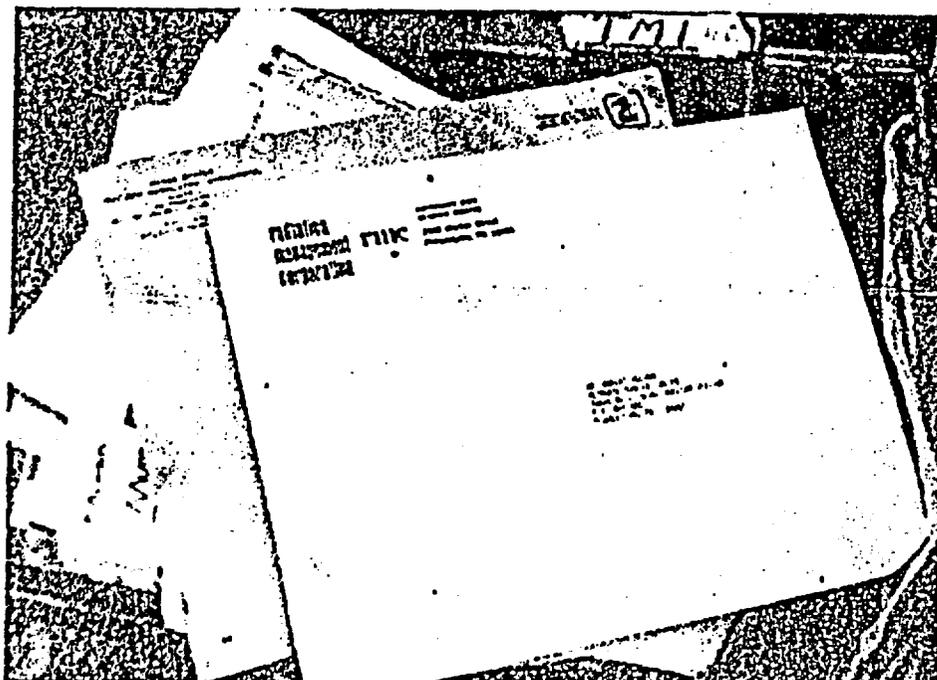
John D. Brubaker, the rural carrier at Middletown who actually delivers mail in the TMI area, said he "wasn't much concerned" about the accident.

"I thought they (TMI employees) knew what was going on. My family wasn't worried, but I did take my daughter-in-law and my granddaughter (age five) 170 miles away," said Brubaker.

"The men who usually work at TMI were not allowed on the Island on March 28," he said. "The next day, the media were all over the place.

"They took pictures of me putting mail in mailboxes," said the postal veteran of 29 years. "I asked one of them, 'If you're so afraid, what are you doing here?' He said, 'Well, the contamination isn't that great yet.'"

That Friday morning, Brubaker was ready to deliver his route when the



# Three Mile Island Vicinity

(Continued from Page 2)



"It was strange. No kids playing. No people around. . . If it happened again, I don't know if I would stick around."

Austin L. Buser  
Postmaster  
Goldsboro (Eiters), PA

When the outdoor ban was finally lifted at 12:30 p.m., Brubaker discovered another problem.

"I couldn't get to the mailboxes. There were cars and trucks backed up on the highway. It was taking me about five to 10 minutes to get from one intersection to another. A state police officer wanted to know what I was doing up there and I told him I was trying to effect delivery."

About three miles north of Middletown, the carriers at Highspire were already making deliveries when Postmaster Ed Baer went out to get both of them.

"We were very lucky," said Baer, explaining that his office had received over 300 mail hold calls during the weekend of the accident. "I think we

in case of emergency. It should be publicized so that customers know where it is."

On the west bank of the Susquehanna, in even smaller towns, it was precisely what people in York Haven and Goldsboro did *not* know that was causing the most concern.

"It's the unknown that puts pressure on you," stated York Haven Postmaster Thomas D. McVey. The panic demonstrated by one York Haven resident substantiated his point convincingly.

"A state policeman came in on Friday and asked me how close we were to Three Mile Island. I told him about two and a half miles. He said to keep all of the employees inside and keep the doors and windows closed.

"Then he went back to his car and got his bull horn and told everybody to stay off the streets," McVey continued. "A few minutes later, I look out the window and see this guy bolting down the street in a pick-up truck. It's loaded with personal belongings and he's wearing one of those masks to keep out the radiation.

"Now *that* scared me.

"If they ever start up again—full power—I'll definitely think about that when I look at those towers," said McVey.

The 600 townspeople of Goldsboro had plenty to think about. One block, a few railroad tracks and about 50 yards downhill from the Eiters (named after its first postmaster John Eiters) Post Office, the massive towers are in plain view.



"It's the unknown that puts pressure on you."

Thomas D. McVey  
Postmaster  
York Haven, PA

Consequently, 538 of the 600 evacuated the area, even though the wind was blowing away from their community. They were no more than three-quarters of a mile from the island, and they knew the direction of the wind could change.

Eiters Postmaster Austin L. Buser was among the 62 who stayed and watched Goldsboro shrink from small town to ghost town.

"It was strange," he recalled. "No kidx playing. No people around. They didn't start to come around (to the post office) again until that next Thursday (April 5).

"I was in the blind for the first couple of days," said Buser. "People would come in and start talking about it but I didn't know who to believe. I talked to Bob Lilley (Lancaster Sectional Center Manager/Postmaster) and he said we wouldn't have delivery on Friday."

Buser said he was more concerned on Sunday "when I heard about the bubble (a hydrogen bubble in the containment building that proved worrisome to state and federal officials)" than he was on Friday.

"If it happened again" he said "I

**Recommendations**  
**for future consideration**

A central clearing-house for information should be established at the first sign of danger to avoid conflicting reports. Emergency Preparedness organizations at the federal, state, and local levels should have easy access to this clearing-house for the latest information.

The Postal Service and other large service agencies should maintain properly calibrated radiological meters and trained monitors.

Federal, state and local government agencies in the vicinity of nuclear power plants should be required to develop and periodically update radiological evacuation contingency plans.

The mail went through.

It was delivered -- 80 percent of it anyway.

And it was delivered on a day that the world held its breath. When Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh considered a mass evacuation of central Pennsylvania. When President Carter sent a personal envoy to Harrisburg to take charge. When families gathered some clothing and headed in all directions out of the area.

It was March 30, 1979 -- the day the nuclear accident two days earlier at Three Mile Island was found to be the most serious in the nation's history.

"We kept sending the carriers out," said Harrisburg Sectional Center Manager Kenneth W. Netznik. "But we just had to be sure we had a way to get them back."

-more-

Peter Bazylewicz, Harrisburg's employee and labor relations director, met with groups of employees throughout the day quelling rumors and answering questions. Bill Wheeler, from the postal data section, monitored the radiation hourly at the downtown Harrisburg Post Office.

But the Harrisburg Post Office was 12 air miles from the stricken TMI plant. The immediate concern that Friday was for the people within a five mile radius of the plant.

Middletown. Highspire. Goldsboro (Etters). York Haven.

All those communities were within the critical radius and each had a post office. Of the four post offices, the Middletown office is by and far the largest.

Postmaster James Miller was concerned for his 31 employees. "The seriousness struck home when one of the carriers came in and said the State Police sent him back, saying he wasn't supposed to be out in the air," he said.

Miller said most of his carriers had left on their routes and, after consultation with the Harrisburg Sectional Center, ordered his carriers off the streets.

"It took about 20 minutes to round everyone up," he said.

John Brubaker is the rural carrier that serves the area in and around TMI. He was set to go Friday morning when Postmaster Miller ordered him to hold. "Oh, I wasn't too much concerned," Brubaker said. "I thought they (the TMI employees) knew what was going on."

A rural carrier for 29 years, Brubaker said he wasn't worried for himself, but was concerned for his daughter-in-law and granddaughter. "That night I took them 170 miles away," he said.

Brubaker's route takes him within a half-mile of TMI on the eastern shore, as it is known, of the Susquehanna River. "The first day (March 28), there was quite a lot of people there. The workers weren't allowed over on the land and there were Met Ed (Metropolitan Edison, the plant's owners) trucks everywhere.

"Thursday," continued Brubaker, "there were trucks and cars parked all over the place. A newsman took my picture delivering mail and asked me if I was afraid. I said to him, 'If you're so afraid, what are you doing?'"

"Well," Brubaker said the reporter replied, "'the contamination isn't that great yet.' I said, 'Well!' and kept on my route."

Brubaker remained in the Middletown office with the rest of the carriers until 12:30 when they were allowed back on the streets. "We all wanted to get our jobs done," said Brubaker.

Postmaster Miller, however, told everyone to be back by 4:30. Eighty percent of the mail was delivered that day in Middletown.

"I couldn't get to the mailboxes that afternoon," said Brubaker. "Cars and trucks and state police cars were parked all over. One state policeman asked what I was doing and I told him I was trying to effect mail delivery.

Saturday, they saw that they kept the area around the boxes clear," said Brubaker, who admitted he was irritated by the traffic and crowds.

Dick Rudy is a city carrier in Middletown. "My only concern was getting my family out. It was one of those unfortunate accidents you hope won't happen."

Rudy, who has been with the Postal Service for eight years, said he plans to stay in Middletown the rest of his life. "I like this area and it'll take more than this to get me out. The people pulled together . . . like the flood in '72" that devastated much of central and north-eastern Pennsylvania."

Saturday, April 1, Rudy said "was like a morgue" around town. "The silencing was deafening." But Rudy and his other carriers got the mail out.

Roy Heller has been with the Postal Service for nine years. He joined the Service in Houston and transferred back to Pennsylvania, where he had been raised. Heller evacuated his wife and three young children and returned to Middletown Sunday night. His children came back the following weekend.

"If they don't close the plant down, we'll leave," he said.

"There's just no way the place can be safe. Before it happened, they said it was one of the safest (plants) in the country," said Heller, shrugging his shoulders.

Pete May, another city carrier, said he didn't think too much about the accident. "I tried not to think about it. What can I be afraid of at 46?"

May stayed, but saw to it that his grandchildren were taken to Kutztown, 54 miles east of the plant. May said he was happy with the way the Postal Service handled the crisis.

"Why take a chance with another man's well-being," he said in praise.

"I'm a little concerned for the future, sure. It's a little shaky said May, "but I like to play my TV. My only concern is for the younger ones -- my grandson is six-weeks-old."

The Highspire Post Office is north of Middletown, just within the five mile radius of TMI. A small office with five employees, Highspire sits on the main road that joins Harrisburg with Middletown. Postmaster Edward Baer said he didn't "really see the danger." But Baer told his wife that he had plans for them to go to Maryland. "I was going to stay."

Baer said he was concerned for the retired people in his area. "The third of the month was coming and how they were going to get their retirement checks was my main concern."

Don F. Bitting is substitute carrier who was out on the street delivering mail that Friday, as it is referred to. "The other carrier wasn't worried about it and I wasn't either." Bitting said he thought all the attention was being brought by people who "wanted to put nuclear power down."

Bitting said his wife wanted "to go somewhere," but that they had no relations anywhere out of the area. "I had confidence in the guys (at TMI) and they did the job. I think the news media blew up the story.

"Look," Bitting said, "it's like the coal mines. Some guys died there. I'm here to stay. I had a job to do and I wanted to get it done."

The mail was delivered in Highspire that Friday.

The east shore of the Susquehanna River is built up with heavy industry and is a suburb for Harrisburg. But the western shore is different.

It takes a trek across the Pennsylvania Turnpike to get to the area that adjoins TMI there. Wooded and rural, it's picture-postcard pretty.

The nearest Post Office is Goldsboro (Etters), a sleepy little town of 200 that quickly became one of the datelines for stories being filed all over the world.

It is about three-quarters of a mile from the TMI cooling towers that peek out over the tree line of the western shore.

Austin Buser is the Postmaster of the turn-of-the-century office in the center of Goldsboro. Although his wife called him and asked him to get out of Goldsboro, Buser remained at his office. "I told her to get in her car and take off if she wanted to. Don't worry about me." Buser said one of his two rural carriers, Sue Haring, took her high school aged daughter and younger child and evacuated. She did not return to the area until the following Wednesday.

"We were lucky," said Buser "If it happened again, I don't know if I'd stay around." Buser said it was strange the following few days in Goldsboro. "There were no kids around, it was strange."

Buser said he hoped they would close the plant.

Down the road, about five miles from the plant, is York Haven.

"I was getting ready to leave on my route," said John Bare, the rural carrier that serves the homes closest to the TMI plant, "when we were told not to go out in the air."

Bare asked Postmaster Thomas McVey for time off to evacuate his family. "I checked which way the wind was blowing and headed west," he said.

Bare said he doesn't understand nuclear power and is "afraid of it. There's gotta be a better way" to generate power.

On Monday, Bare was back on his route and said he "felt alone out there. All the people were just gone."

Raymond Ness, the other rural carrier at York Haven, wasn't as concerned as Bare. "We need nuclear power, we have to have it." Although Ness has no young children, he said he was concerned for his pregnant daughter, who did evacuate the area. Ness also had a radiation test in Middletown and the results were negative.

"There was a lot of pressure on the people here," said Postmaster McVey. "The news reports and the rumors Friday shook me a little. The State Police came in and asked how close we were to the cooling towers and said to stay indoors and turn off the heat.

"Then he went back to his car, turned on his flashing light and used his bullhorn to tell the people in town to stay indoors.

"It was scary," admitted McVey.

District Manager Robert J. Brown, who throughout the crisis manned his office in Camp Hill, about 15 miles northwest of Three Mile Island, had nothing but the highest praise for all the postal employees in the area.

"In the face of the crisis the tension in the area, I have the highest regard for all the men and women of the Postal Service in central Pennsylvania."