

A non-literal translation of the radio program's content:

In the past, government officials and security experts in the Switzerland government didn't put too much weight on the need to evacuate people after an accident at a nuclear plant, focusing instead on measures that would get people to shelter in place and stay in their homes. But this view has now changed, according to Stefan Sellmeyer from the Federal Ministry for the Protection of the Citizenry. "There are situations, such as the one in Japan naturally, where an event continues on over a longer period of time. If something similar were to occur in Switzerland, people would have to be evacuated." Before Fukushima, in the summer of 2009, the Federal Ministry for the Protection of the Citizenry started a project in conjunction with the ETH (the highly-lauded Technical University) in Zurich, to figure out if and how thousands and thousands of people could be evacuated from the dangerous area around a nuclear plant. The central focus of the project is a computer simulation. Seven million virtual Swiss citizens live in this computer simulation and do what their counterparts made of flesh and blood also do. They go to work in the morning, home in the evening, and on a little road trip every once and awhile. Originally the computer simulation was used for traffic control purposes. Now it is being used to simulate the evacuation of 200,000 people, the estimated amount that would be impacted by an accident at a nuclear plant. "If an evacuation was to occur at 8 am, we would know where the people are, which forms of transportation they were using, and in which direction they were moving. That's a starting point." The rest of the behavior of Herr and Frau Swiss Person in the cyber-evacuation is based on the study of real situations, which shows that most people would prefer to use their own vehicles or public transportation for evacuating over government-provided means of transportation. In order to program other forms of behavior, the researchers surveyed a group of people about how they would react in a crisis. "If the person would go home first and wait until the whole family was together before starting off or if they would directly leave the dangerous region." So far, the researchers have run one full test that shows that the evacuation of 200,000 people from a large area would be possible in a half day. It is worth noting though, that this simulation was run to calculate what would happen in optimal circumstances and with a minimal amount of time allocated for an evacuation. The simulation showed that the traffic chaos would not be the most difficult thing to deal with logistically, but rather the difficulty logistically would come from the evacuation of those individuals that do not have the means (mobility) to flee themselves - such as hospital patients, people in old folks homes, or prisoners. No one will be surprised, though, that subject matter experts emphasize the difficulties of extrapolating from such a simulation, like Claire Rubin, an expert in crisis management from the USA. The uncertainty has to do with the reaction of people. "With natural disasters, you always get a huge, voluntary, altruistic kind of response. People will help each other." (The radio announcer translates this comment into German after playing it in English). But with a nuclear accident, people would not know what to do because they cannot see the danger. For this reason, they would react differently - less helpfully and in a more self-interested manner. Rubin: "People aren't going to hand around, they are not going to stay to help people, they are not going to make a return trip in with their bus, to get a second load of people after they've driven the first load out." In

addition, the information that victims in a nuclear accident would have about the situation represents even greater difficulties, says the psychologist, Thomas Brudermann, who studies mass psychological phenomena. "When people don't know what to do, when they have no past experience with a certain type of situation, then they mimic what other people do, which means that in crisis situations, people are vulnerable to the power of suggestion. This creates the danger of false rumors." Panic can be the result, and the situation gets out of control. In order to understand this type of event, it is best to learn from real situations, say Claire Rubin, because often the real situations far exceed what has been forecast as a possibility in simulated scenarios, like in Fukushima. "They knew they were earthquake prone, they were as well-prepared as any country in the world, but with a tsunami on top of the earthquake, and with a nuclear plant - no one ever imagined that scenario, and it was dreadful." Stefan Sellmeyer from the Federal Ministry for the Protection of the Citizenry also sees the boundaries of the simulation's usefulness. "It is not so important whether we can pinpoint a precise time for the evacuation, but our goal is to help reduce the uncertainty factors for those agencies that will have to order an evacuation." In the end, the fact is that a huge evacuation, are an incredibly difficult situation to handle, no matter what preparation has been undertaken. One can only hope, that one will never be necessary here in Switzerland.