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# Powerful TMI satellite images raise concern

A watchdog group has taken issue with satellite images of Three Mile Island. The plant is not worried.

By [SEAN ADKINS](#)

[Daily Record/Sunday News](#)

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A screen shot from the [www.bing.com](#) Web site shows a bird's-eye view of Three Mile Island (Submitted)

A former head of security at Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station said that a terrorist group would likely use online satellite images if it were planning to attack a nuclear-powered plant.

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"It's the best preparation you can have," John Jasinski said. "Any special forces unit that goes on any kind of mission, the first thing they look at are satellite images. That's what terrorist organizations want to see."

Log onto most public mapping Web sites such as those hosted by Yahoo, Microsoft and Google and one option is to zoom in on a specific property with the aid of satellite imaging.

For example, a quick search of Three Mile Island in Dauphin County at a site hosted by Microsoft reveals an overhead view of the sprawling plant complete with clear images of cars and individual buildings.

In one image, steam flows from the plant's two active cooling towers.

While TMI officials are aware of the satellite images, the plant's security program is designed and tested to defend against a threat that would have insider information pertaining to the site, not just an overhead scan of the property, said Ralph DeSantis, a plant spokesman.

"You're not looking at live images," he said. "You're looking at one point in time. Our big upper hand are the things that these images don't show, the security strategies employed at the plant."

One TMI watchdog has taken issue with the public availability of satellite images of nuclear-powered plants.

Earlier this month, Scott Portzline

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met with U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials in an effort to alert the agency to the improved quality of online satellite images, specifically in the area of security at Three Mile Island.

Portzline is a security consultant with TMI Alert -- a group of activists concerned about the state and national regulation of the nuclear-power industry.

"I think I look at satellite images of TMI every three months or so," Portzline said. "I like to see what changes and improvements are taking place at the plant. It's just a way for me to check up on things like security and ongoing projects at the plant."

About a month ago, Portzline logged onto an online mapping site hosted by Microsoft, searched Three Mile Island and noticed that the image quality had improved to the point where he could make out what appeared to be a guard shack on top of a building.

"That's when I realized that the images were revealing more than the security forces would like," he said. "I'm not for censorship, but, in this case, I would be in favor of some limits. I think one should be able to see images of the plant, just not at such detailed quality. If you have that much detail, you would know your way around the outside of the plant."

This is not the first time that online images have caught the attention of the commission.

After the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the commission decided that the images were not of high enough resolution to be of concern, said Neil Sheehan, an NRC spokesman.

Now, as mapping programs have improved, the commission would be interested in once again reviewing the satellite images based on the new technology, he said.

"We are willing to take a fresh look at the images that are out there and maybe work with Homeland Security on this

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issue," Sheehan said. "It's premature (to say) what we would do. The first thing is that the NRC has to look at the images for itself."

Regardless of any action that would be taken by the federal government, the images currently would aid an aggressor in compromising the security force of a plant, Jasinski said.

"It gives you a clear view of a plant's camera system, fence line and bullet proof towers," he said. "It's intelligence. It's unfortunate that it's out there."

DeSantis said the images are not a concern to TMI since the plant has a robust security program that benefits from regular full-scale drills and tests.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, TMI has spent \$17 million on security upgrades such as guard towers, barriers, vehicle checkpoints and surveillance equipment, he said.

One local representative said it's likely to be impossible to remove all the security risks across the nation displayed on those digital pictures, said State Rep. Eugene DePasquale, D-West Manchester Township.

"You can't put the genie back in the bottle," he said. "And those photos are not illegal. I would think that a well-funded terrorist organization has the ability to get information without going to Google."

## ONLINE

Many Internet search engines have a mapping link.

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