

Caldicott: Japan may spell end of nuclear industry worldwide

HELEN CALDICOTT IN MONTREAL, MARCH 18

By [Global Research](#)

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Helen Caldicott will be speaking in Montreal on Friday March 18, at Centre Saint Pierre.



[Helen Caldicott: Conference on THE NUCLEAR DANGER: Nuclear War and Nuclear Power](#)

Montreal. March 18

People all over the world are watching updates on the Japanese nuclear emergency in growing horror and disbelief. Despite soothing words from nuclear energy industry promoters, each [update today](#) has signalled fresh disaster and even more drastic warnings. Anti-nuclear campaigner Dr Helen Caldicott says it could spell the end of the nuclear industry worldwide. David Donovan reports.

There appears to be massive divergence of opinion between experts about just how cataclysmic the Japanese situation could be.

Yesterday, Japan's nuclear agency attempted to calm fears by ranking the incident as a Category 4 nuclear accident, below the 1979 Three Mile Island partial meltdown in the US and well below the Chernobyl meltdown and explosion 25 years ago which rated top of the scale at seven. Chernobyl was the world's worst nuclear disaster to date, scattering a radioactive cloud over millions of people in Russia and Europe, causing massive loss of life.

[Last night](#), the former head of Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Association (ANSTO) and major promoter of an Australian nuclear power industry, Dr Ziggy Switkowski, spoke soothing words about the situation in Japan, saying it was well in hand and was not even Japan's most urgent priority.

I think the authorities have got much more urgent things to attend to than what the current nuclear challenge presents. Because I think the difficulties with the one, two or three reactors that are at the moment taking up all of the time will be progressively confronted and overcome I would think in the days ahead.

The Japanese authorities yesterday claimed that, despite the explosions, the 6 foot steel and iron containment vessel enclosing the reactors, which are designed to limit the loss of radiation into the atmosphere, had not been breached. After the 3rd explosion reported this morning, the Japanese authorities have since been notably quiet on this point.

As a sign of the increasing urgency, [news reports](#) at 1.03pm (AEDST) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan had taken over personal control of the official response to the nuclear disaster.

Then, at 1.50pm today it was reported: "It is clear that radiation has been spewing out into the atmosphere".

The UK Telegraph has raised the spectre of a potential "nuclear nightmare" and is calling this the second worst nuclear disaster in history.

"The Fukushima crisis now rates as a more serious accident than the partial meltdown at Three Mile Island in the US in 1979, and is second only to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, according to the French nuclear safety authority. After insisting for three days that the situation was under control, Japan urgently appealed to US and UN nuclear experts for technical help on preventing white-hot fuel rods melting."

[Dr. Michiko Kaku](#), a theoretical physicist at the City University of New York, yesterday offered a dire worst case scenario.

"The worst-case scenario is a steam/hydrogen gas explosion which blows the reactor vessels apart, sending uranium dioxide fuel rods and radioactive debris into the air. This might happen if the core is fully exposed for a few hours, which is a distinct possibility. This is what happened at Chernobyl, when such an explosion blew about 25 per cent of the core's radioactive by-products into the air."

Despite the authorities pumping sea-water in to cool the cores, it appears as if they have been exposed for some time today. Depending on the winds, experts say Tokyo could be at risk. At 3.30pm higher than normal radiation levels were being reported in Tokyo, though apparently not enough to harm human health.

Confusingly, at 4.14pm, the Financial Times reported that Shan Nair, the nuclear physicist who advised the European Commission on its response to the Chernobyl disaster, as saying that "It's a bad accident but it's not a Chernobyl".

It seems we have no alternative but to painfully wait and see just how severe this disaster will turn out to be.

Dr Helen Caldicott: 'The situation is very grim and not just for the Japanese people'

One person who is in no doubt about the seriousness of the incident is prominent anti-nuclear campaigner, Dr Helen Caldicott. Independent Australia spoke exclusively to Dr Caldicott yesterday as she was in transit to Canada to speak at a hearing into a proposal to build four new power plants in Darlington, Ontario.

Dr. Helen Caldicott is perhaps most influential environmental activist in the past 35 years.

She called the situation in Japan was an "absolute disaster" that could be many, many times

worse than Chernobyl. Dr Helen Caldicott raised the possibility of cataclysmic loss of life and suggested the emergency could be far more severe than Chernobyl.

“The situation is very grim and not just for the Japanese people,” said Dr Caldicott.

“If both reactors blow then the whole of the Northern Hemisphere may be affected,” she said.

“Only one reactor blew at Chernobyl and it was only 3 months old, with new cores holding relatively little radiation; these ones have been operating for 40 years and would hold about 30 times more radiation than Chernobyl’s.”

Dr Caldicott cited a [report from the New York Academy of Sciences](#), which said that over 1 million people have died as a direct result of the 1986 melt-down at Chernobyl, mostly from cancer. She said authorities had attempted to “hush up” the full scale of the Chernobyl disaster. The official 2005 figure from the International Atomic Energy Agency was just 4,000 fatalities.

The NYAS is a credible 200 year-old scientific institution. Their précis of the report is as follows:

This is a collection of papers translated from the Russian with some revised and updated contributions. Written by leading authorities from Eastern Europe, the volume outlines the history of the health and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. According to the authors, official discussions from the International Atomic Energy Agency and associated United Nations’ agencies (e.g. the Chernobyl Forum reports) have largely downplayed or ignored many of the findings reported in the Eastern European scientific literature and consequently have erred by not including these assessments.

When asked whether the disaster in Japan could be, say, 30 times worse than Chernobyl, Dr Caldicott said it could be even most catastrophic than that.

“It could be much, much, worse than that,” said Dr Caldicott.

“This could be a diabolical catastrophe—we’ll just have to wait and see.”

Dr Caldicott said any fall-out was unlikely to affect Australia, though the death toll in the northern hemisphere could be severe.

“Australia is probably not going to be affected by fall-out because the northern and southern air masses don’t mix.”

“But in the northern hemisphere, many millions could get cancer”.

Dr Caldicott said that despite the best efforts of nuclear energy campaigners, the Japanese disaster is likely to spell the end of the industry not just in Australia but worldwide.

“We’ve had earthquakes in Australia before—no-one will want to risk this happening in this country.”

“But I think the nuclear industry is finished worldwide.”

“I have said before, unfortunately, the only thing that is capable of stopping this wicked industry is a major catastrophe, and it now looks like this may be it.”

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