

Fukushima: Worse than You Know: Tepco Has No Idea How to Stabilize the Reactors

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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You've heard bad news about Fukushima recently.

But it's *worse* than you know.

The Wall Street Journal notes that radiation levels *outside* the plant are [likely higher than inside the reactor](#):

NRA [Nuclear Regulation Authority] officials said highly contaminated water may be leaking into the soil from a number of trenches, allowing the water to seep into the site's groundwater and eventually into the ocean.

Both radioactive substances are considered harmful to health. An NRA official said Monday that the very high levels were likely to be even higher than those within the reactor units themselves.

It was by far the highest concentration of radioactivity detected since soon after Japan's March 2011 earthquake and tsunami

How could it be more radioactive *outside* the nuclear reactors? The reactors have [lost containment](#), and experts [have no idea where the nuclear cores are](#).

And the problems which have been detected at ground-level are only the tip of the iceberg. Japan Times [points out](#):

Cesium levels in water under Fukushima No. 1 plant soar the deeper it gets, Tepco reveals

Tepco found 950 million becquerels of cesium and 520 million becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive substances, including strontium, in the water from 13 meters [~43 feet] underground.

Water from 1 meter down contained 340 million becquerels, and a sample from 7 meters down contained 350 million becquerels.

Cesium, a metallic element, is subject to gravity.

Yomiuri reports that [highly-radioactive groundwater could start coming to the surface](#) at the Fukushima plant:

TEPCO spokesman Noriyuki Imaizumi revealed the water level of the tainted groundwater in a test well located on the sea side of the No. 2 reactor has risen rapidly.

“If the water level continues to rise, it could reach the ground surface,” Imaizumi, an acting general manager of the company’s nuclear power-related division, said at a press conference Monday.

According to the company, the water level has risen about 70 centimeters over the past 20 days.

To prevent contaminated groundwater from leaking into the sea, TEPCO is working to reinforce the ground foundation of seawalls. The rising water level in the test well means the measures to prevent leakage have been working.

However, the company apparently failed to give much thought to the fact that the groundwater would have nowhere else to go

The groundwater problems are apparently due to Tepco’s lack of planning. NHK [points out](#):

[Tepco] learnt on Wednesday that its efforts to prevent radiation-tainted groundwater from seeping into the sea are failing.

TEPCO has been trying to solidify the embankment of the crippled power plant.

TEPCO says water levels in one of the contaminated wells have risen by about 1 meter since the work began in early July.

It says this is likely the result of its work to solidify the ground [to a depth of 16 meters], using chemicals.

The company says soil up to 2 meters below the ground cannot be hardened, and water may be seeping out.

Reuters [notes](#) that the bolts in Fukushima’s tanks will corrode in just a few years, and a plant workers reveal — “Tepco says it doesn’t know how long tanks will hold”:

Experts say Tepco is attempting the most ambitious nuclear clean-up in history, even greater than the Chernobyl disaster

Radioactive water that cools the reactors ...]mixes with some 400 tonnes of

fresh groundwater pouring into the plant daily.

Workers have built more than 1,000 tanks

With more than 85 percent of the 380,000 tonnes of storage capacity filled, Tepco has said it could run out of space.

The tanks are built from parts of disassembled old containers brought from defunct factories and put together with new parts, workers from the plant told Reuters. They say steel bolts in the tanks will corrode in a few years.

Tepco says it does not know how long the tanks will hold.

Asahi [writes](#):

[Tepco's] appallingly shoddy handling of radioactive water that is leaking from the crippled plant into the sea.

At the No. 3 reactor, highly radioactive "mystery steam" has been spotted.

The fact that radioactive substances are still being released into the ground, the sea and the air is irrefutable proof that the nuclear disaster of March 2011 is not over. The responsible parties must take this situation gravely

The utility's glaring ineptitude with crisis management was noted right from the start of the Fukushima disaster.

We have zero faith in the utility's reliability as an operator of any nuclear power plant. In fact, allowing the company to handle nuclear energy is simply out of the question.

The entire company now needs to be focused on preventing radioactive substances from escaping into the environment.

Yomiuri argues that the government agency overseeing Fukushima has no idea what's going on:

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, which oversees safety management at the nuclear plant, decided to set up a working team to analyze conditions concerning contamination.

But the NRA's actions have also been badly delayed. At a meeting Monday, an expert said the NRA "still can't grasp the risks posed by the current situation."

As Enformable points out, top Japanese officials are [finally calling for Tepco to be fired](#):

In case one hasn't paid attention the constant stream of international experts who have called for TEPCO to be removed as the organization in charge of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima Daiichi reactors, Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority [has also called for](#)

[Tokyo Electric to be removed](#). "It is simply too big for one company to handle," said Tanaka, at a press conference Wednesday. "Placing all the burden (of controlling the site) on them won't solve the problem."

Remember, an official Japanese government investigation concluded that the Fukushima accident was a ["man-made" disaster, caused by caused by "collusion" between government and Tepco and bad reactor design](#). And yet the Japanese government has allowed the culprit - Tepco - to oversee the "cleanup", [in the same way that the U.S. government allowed BP to oversee the "cleanup"](#) of the Gulf oil spill even though BP's criminal negligence caused the spill in the first place.

ABC Australia [reports](#):

It's taken about two-and-a-half years, but it seems the Japanese government is finally losing patience with the operator of the Fukushima nuclear plant. The reason: its haphazard approach to stabilising the complex. Last week it was unexplained steam rising from the shattered remains of the building housing the melted reactor number three. This week it's TEPCO's admission that radioactive water from the plant has probably been leaking into the Pacific for the last three months.

NHK [notes](#):

[Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide] Suga told reporters after the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday that the government views this as a grave matter.

Tepco's own advisors are also blasting the operator of the stricken nuclear plant. AFP [points out](#):

Foreign nuclear experts on Friday blasted the operator of Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, with one saying its lack of transparency over toxic water leaks showed "you don't know what you're doing"... "appears that you are not keeping the people of Japan informed. These actions indicate that you don't know what you are doing ...you do not have a plan and that you are not doing all you can to protect the environment and the people." [said Dale Klein, Former NRC Chairman and Tepco advisory committee member]

Nuclear expert - and former high-level nuclear industry executive - Arnie Gundersen says that Fukushima has ["contaminated the biggest body of water on the planet", and that the whole Pacific Ocean likely to have cesium levels 5-10 times higher than at peak of nuclear bomb tests](#).

How could this happen? Doesn't the ocean dilute radiation to the point it is rendered harmless? No, actually:

- A previously-secret government report concluded in 1955 that the ocean [may not adequately dilute radiation from nuclear accidents](#)
- Scientists say that radiation on the West Coast of North America could end up being [10 times higher than in Japan](#)

- The amount of radioactive fuel at Fukushima [dwarfs the amount at Chernobyl](#)
- Massive leaks have been continuing at Fukushima on a [daily basis for years](#) (and [here](#))

The chairman of the NRA says (via the [New York Times](#)):

Considering the state of the plant, it's difficult to find a solution today or tomorrow... That's probably not satisfactory to many of you. But that's the reality we face after an accident like this... We don't truly know whether that will work....

Indeed, [technology doesn't currently even exist to stabilize and clean up Fukushima](#), and Tepco - with [no financial incentive](#) to actually fix things - has been [pretending](#) to clean it up.

Japan Times [notes](#):

Fukushima ... seems to lurch from one problem to the next

When the situation is so bad that Shunichi Tanaka, the NRA chairman, is stating in a press conference, with regard to water leaks, that "if you have any better ideas, we'd like to know," it should be clear that Fukushima No. 1 still requires the upmost attention.

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