

Japan's Nuclear Volcano Erupts

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Shares plunged across Europe, Asia and the United States on Tuesday as the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant deepened and Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency raised its radiological event scale to its highest level. Conditions at the stricken facility have steadily deteriorated despite the valiant efforts of emergency workers. The station continues to spew lethal amounts of radiation and other toxins into the atmosphere and around the world. A French nuclear group has warned that children and pregnant mothers should protect themselves from the fallout. According to Euractiv:

"The risks associated with iodine-131 contamination in Europe are no longer 'negligible,' according to CRIIRAD, a French research body on radioactivity. The NGO is advising pregnant women and infants against 'risky behavior,' such as consuming fresh milk or vegetables with large leaves."

The group's warning underlines the dangers posed by the out-of-control facility which is causing unprecedented damage to earth, sea and sky. But while the disaster continues to grow larger by the day, the government's only response has been to expand the evacuation zone and try to shape news to minimize the public backlash.

Emergency crews have braved high levels of radiation to bring the plant back under control, but with little success. A number of violent tremors and a second smaller tsunami have made their jobs nearly impossible. Thousands of gallons of radioactive water that was used as coolant has been flushed into the sea threatening marine life and sensitive habitat. The toxic release of radiation now poses an incalculable risk to the battered fishing industry and to fish-stocks around the world. This is from an article at Global Research:

"Fish in nearby waters are now being measured at 4,000% above the Codex Alimentarius limits for Iodine-131 and 447% of Caesium-137. Radioactive caesium has a half-life of 30 years. Radiation levels for the isotope are not considered "safe" for 10 to 20 times longer. The caesium released today will remain dangerous six centuries from now...."Fukushima has become the dirty bomb of the Pacific"....("Radiation Spreads Worldwide", Freedom Against Censorship Thailand, Global Research, April 14, 2011)

These costs were never factored in when industry executives and politicians decided to exploit an energy source that can cause cancer, pollute the environment for millennia, and bring the world's third largest economy to its knees.

Raising the alert-rating to its highest level is an admission that a "major release of radioactive material with widespread health and environmental effects" has taken place and

will likely continue for some time to come. The situation is getting worse by the day. Japan's government will now insist on the "implementation of planned and extended countermeasures." In other words, a red alert. The threat to water supplies, food sources, livestock and humans is grave and ongoing. The media's efforts to protect the nuclear industry by downplaying the scale of the catastrophe have been moderately successful, but public awareness is rising as more people turn to alternate sources of information. The disaster has been as ruinous to the media's reputation as it has been to the environment.

This is from Reuters:

"Japan's economics minister warned on Tuesday that the economic damage from last month's earthquake and tsunami is likely to be worse than initially thought as power shortages will crimp factory output and restrict supply chains.

"The more sober assessment came as Japan raised the severity of its nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to a level 7 from 5, putting it on par with the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986.

"The Bank of Japan governor said the economy was in a "severe state," while central bankers were uncertain when efforts to rebuild the tsunami-ravaged northeast would boost growth, according to minutes from a meeting held three days after a record earthquake struck Japan on March 11." ("Japan quake's economic impact worse than first feared", Reuters, April 14, 2011)

Foreign investors have yet to grasp the full impact of the crisis on Japan's economy. The Bank of Japan (BOJ) has increased its bond purchasing program and "launched an ultra-cheap loan scheme for banks in the area devastated by the quake", but monetary policy alone will not lead to a recovery. The government will have to initiate large-scale programs to engage the public while setting aside neoliberal policies that slash state spending and privatize public assets. Restoring economic well-being means strong leadership that moves forcefully in the opposite direction of present trends with the emphasis on shared sacrifice and community values.

This is from the Wall Street Journal:

"Fukushima Daiichi operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. warned Tuesday that since the Fukushima Daiichi plant is still releasing radioactive materials, the total level of radiation released could eventually exceed that of Chernobyl, a spokesman said.

"The new assessment comes as Japan admits that the effects of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident—which has already caused the evacuation of tens of thousands of people and spread radiation through groundwater and farms over a broad section of eastern Japan—are likely to be long-lasting and grave.....

"Japanese nuclear regulators determined that after the accident, the plant has likely released tens of thousands of terabecquerels—or a mind-boggling tens of thousands of trillions of becquerels—of radiation in the immediate area. That's a level that's been recorded only during the Chernobyl accident." ("Japanese Declare Crisis at Level of Chernobyl", Wall Street Journal)

Experts anticipate that the troubles at Fukushima will persist for months if not years. In the

meantime, life-threatening levels of toxic radioactive material will be released into the air, water and soil. Small children and the unborn are at greatest risk, but incidents of adult thyroid cancer, immune system disorders and other maladies will increase exponentially as well. The future of the nuclear industry has never been more uncertain, and for good reason.

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