

Nuclear Plants Plus Hurricanes: Disasters Waiting to Happen

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Featured image: St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant at Port St. Lucie, Florida (Source: The Progressive)

Although the mainstream media said next to nothing about it, [independent experts](#) have made it clear that Hurricanes Harvey and Irma threatened six U.S. nuclear plants with major destruction, and therefore all of us with apocalyptic disaster. It is [a danger that remains](#) for the inevitable hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters yet to come.

During Harvey and Irma, six holdovers from a [dying reactor industry](#)—two on the Gulf Coast at South Texas, two at Key Largo and two more north of Miami at Port St. Lucie—were under [severe threat](#) of [catastrophic failure](#). All of them rely on off-site power systems that were extremely vulnerable throughout the storms. At St. Lucie Unit One, an NRC official reported a salt buildup on electrical equipment requiring a [power downgrade](#) in the midst of the storm.

Loss of backup electricity was at the core of the 2011 [catastrophe](#) at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan when the tsunami there and ensuing flood shorted out critical systems. The reactor cores could not be cooled. Three melted. Their cores have yet to be found. Water pouring over them flooded into the Pacific, carrying away [unprecedented quantities](#) of cesium and other radioactive isotopes. In 2015, scientists detected radioactive contamination from Fukushima along the coast near British Columbia and California.

[Four](#) of six Fukushima Daichi reactors suffered hydrogen explosions, releasing radioactive fallout [far in excess](#) of what came down after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Extreme danger [still surrounds](#) Fukushima's highly radioactive [fuel pools](#), which are in varied stages of ruin.

“In addition to reactors, which at least are within containment structures, high-level radioactive waste storage pools are not within containment, and are also mega-catastrophes waiting to happen, as in the event of a natural disaster like a hurricane,” says Kevin Kamps of the activist group [Beyond Nuclear](#).

In 1992 [Hurricane Andrew paralyzed fire protection systems](#) at Florida's Turkey Point and so severely damaged a 350-foot-high tower it had to be demolished. The eye of that storm went directly over the reactor, sweeping away support buildings valued at \$100 million or more.

There's no reason to rule out a future storm negating fire protection systems, flinging airborne debris into critical support buildings, killing off-site backup power, and more.

As during Andrew, the owners of the nuclear plants under assault from Harvey and Irma had an interest in dragging their feet on timely shut-downs. Because they are not liable for downwind damage done in a major disaster, the utilities can profit by keeping the reactors operating as long as they can, despite the [obvious public danger](#).

Viable evacuation plans are a legal requirement for continued reactor operation. But such planning has been a major bone of contention, prompting prolonged court battles at Seabrook, New Hampshire, and playing a [critical role](#) in the shutdown of the Shoreham reactor on Long Island. After a 1986 earthquake damaged the Perry reactor in Ohio, then-Governor Richard Celeste sued to delay issuance of the [plant's operating license](#). A state commission later concluded evacuation during a [disaster](#) there was not possible. After Andrew, nuclear opponents like Greenpeace [questioned the right of the plant to continue operating](#) in light of what could occur during a hurricane.

Throughout the world, some 430 reactors are in various stages of vulnerability to natural disaster, including ninety-nine in the United States. Numerous nuclear plants have already been damaged by earthquakes, storms, tsunamis, and floods. The complete blackout of any serious discussion of what Harvey and Irma threatened to do to these six Texas and Florida reactors is cause for deep concern.

Harvey Wasserman's California Solartopia show airs at KPFK-FM in Los Angeles; his Green Power & Wellness Show is podcast at [prn.fm](#). He is the author of Solartopia! Our Green-Powered Earth and co-author of Killing Our Own: The Disaster of America's Experience with Atomic Radiation.

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