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## U.S. Nuclear Scares and Dishonest Industry - Signs of Nuclear Crisis in America?

Despite the summer heat, numerous natural disasters across the nation has chilled the authorities and local citizens - not just because of their innate threats, but due to the extending threats posed by their neighboring nuclear power plants.

### ***Floods and Fire threaten nuclear plants across the nation***

The almost record-breaking wildfire in Los Alamos, New Mexico has been raging dangerously close to the Los Alamos National Nuclear Laboratory. While officials tried to assure the public saying that dangerous materials were safely stored and capable of withstanding flames. The laboratory established a network of high-volume air samplers around the lab property to verify the absence of leaking hazardous materials in smoke from the fire. However, Area G remains as an immediate threat, containing up to 30,000 fifty five gallon drums of plutonium-contaminated nuclear waste. These drums are simply stored above ground in an ordinary building, from which the fire is about 3 miles away.

Though not an immediate problem like Los Alamos, record floods in Missouri threaten two nuclear plants in Nebraska.

The rising floodwaters from Missouri River lapped at the Fort Calhoun Nuclear Power Plant north of Omaha, Nebraska and the Cooper Nuclear Station in southwest of Nebraska, causing public concern as the water surrounded the reactors. Though Fort Calhoun has been closed since April for routine refueling and floodwaters at Cooper Station are below shut-down levels, the concerns remain.

The "tipping point" is when flood waters hit 1,014 feet above sea level, at which point the situation could spin out of control, according to bigthink. Flood waters are currently at 1,007 feet.

While the situation seems stable and ample time is given to take emergency measures, the Cooper Station plant is nearly a carbon copy of the Mark I GE boiling water reactor found at Fukushima, stated bigthink.

On Friday, the federal government updated the public that the Fort Calhoun nuclear power station in Nebraska remains shut down due to Missouri River flooding, but the plant itself has not flooded and is expected to remain safe, reported Reuters.

Furthermore, in Minot, North Dakota, the Souris River flood has spared the 150 nuclear-armed strategic ballistic missiles on alert in underground silos at a nearby Air Force base. "Our missile launch facilities are not directly threatened by the flooding of the Souris River," Captain Genieve David told Global Security Newswire on Thursday in a brief phone interview from Minot Air Force Base, located 8 miles north of the city limits. Minuteman III nuclear missile silos was shielded by pumps and sandbags.

### ***Will the U.S. learn lessons from Fukushima?***

The nuclear meltdown and radiation releases from reactors in Fukushima, Japan after massive earthquakes and tsunami hit the coast area in March 2011 inevitably raised concerns about nuclear safety.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) spokesperson Scott Burnell told IPS News that nuclear plants are not designed to withstand the devastation at Fukushima.

But after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, nuclear plant owners were required to upgrade their protection. Burnell described the safety regulations at sites across the country. In Florida, for example, plants are designed to withstand hurricane-force winds, while in the Midwest, engineers plan for "the most significant earthquake that could be expected," IPS News quoted Burnell.

"The bottom line is, the United States nuclear power plants are designed to safely withstand the most severe events that can be expected at each individual site," he said.

But really, how far are we from the devastating nuclear meltdown in Fukushima? Are the nuclear reactors in America really safe?

Japan's Fukushima disaster in March, 2011 "follows decades of falsified safety reports, fatal accidents and underestimated earthquake risks in Japan's atomic power industry," said Bloomberg on March 18.

Time has come for America to prove whether the same is true in this country.

After a yearlong investigation, The Associated Press published a hard-hitting four-part series of reports, revealing the relationship between the nuclear power industry and NRC. AP has found that Federal regulators have been working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards, or simply failing to enforce them. The existing standards failed by reactors would be brushed off as "unnecessarily conservative."

As a result, safety is significantly undermined, and the NRC's accommodations inch the reactors closer to an accident that could harm the public and jeopardize the future of nuclear power in the U.S., reported AP.

The examples provided by AP include:

- When valves leaked, more leakage was allowed - up to 20 times the original limit.
- When rampant cracking caused radioactive leaks from steam generator tubing, an easier test of the tubes was devised, so plants could meet standardsFailed cables.
- Busted seals. Broken nozzles, clogged screens, cracked concrete, dented containers, corroded metals and rusty underground pipes

... and thousands of other problems.

A blog post on cleanenergy.org reads, "The series of reports comes at a time when revelations about the relationship between Japanese nuclear regulators, government officials and the electric utilities are being uncovered. The recent news that Tepco seriously underestimated the risk and size of a tsunami in their one-page tsunami plan, which regulators shockingly approved, should give pause that the U.S. is not immune to similar oversight issues."

Many problems AP found could trigger a nuclear disaster. And we may witness its dawn sooner than expected.

AP's investigation also found that a radioactive form of hydrogen is escaping from nearly three quarters of U.S. nuclear sites, sometimes in quantities hundreds of times over the federal limit of what is hazardous in drinking water. Tritium has leaked out at 48 of 65 sites nationwide, with potential of seeping into groundwater.

"You got pipes that have been buried underground for 30 or 40 years, and they've never been inspected, and the NRC is looking the other way," said engineer Paul Blanch, a nuclear engineer turned whistleblower. "They could have corrosion all over the place."

### ***Cuomo plans to secure New York***

In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo has expressed his plan to shut down the Indian Point Energy Center, a three-unit nuclear power plant station located in Buchanan, around 35 miles north of Manhattan.

He intensified that campaign after Japan's Fukushima Daichi plant narrowly averted a catastrophic meltdown, saying "this plant in this proximity to the city was never a good risk." Cuomo had previously called the plant a "catastrophe waiting to happen" and opposes renewing licenses on its reactors, which expire in 2013 and 2015, respectively.

It may be true that no nuclear plant comes with zero risks. However, the robustness of nuclear power plants in the face of natural disasters should be thoroughly - and honestly - examined and enhanced as the global climate change causes the mother earth to rage against humanity - or so it seems. The United States is expected to take a more critical look at its nuclear plants, more than 100 of them, and reinforce the need for constant vigilance of these vulnerable giant tanks.

With more than 100 nuclear reactors, the United States stands out as the world's largest supplier of commercial nuclear power.

[Also Read: Los Alamos Fire Threat Put Safety of Nuclear Labs across U.S. into Question](#)