

Japan suspends work at nuclear plant as radiation surges

[CBC News](#)

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Japan's top government spokesman says a surge in radiation at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant on Wednesday has made it too dangerous for workers to stay at the facility.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said efforts to douse the crippled reactors with water had to be stopped and the workers withdrawn after radiation levels surged to dangerous levels.

"So the workers cannot carry out even minimal work at the plant now," Edano said. "Because of the radiation risk, we are on standby."

Edano said the Japanese government would likely ask the U.S. military for help, but wasn't specific about what kind of help.

Earlier on Wednesday, another fire broke out at the plant's No. 4 reactor, operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. said.

TEPCO said the new fire was essentially the same blaze that erupted Tuesday, and that it had not been fully extinguished.

Officials with Japan's nuclear safety agency said it was this fire that is believed to be the cause of the radiation surge.

TEPCO spokesman Hajimi Motujuku said the blaze erupted in the outer housing of reactor No. 4's containment vessel. Japan's nuclear safety agency also confirmed the fire, whose cause was not immediately known.

About three hours after the fire erupted, fire and smoke could no longer be seen at that reactor, but it wasn't clear if it had been put out by workers who were trying to contain it.

REPORT FROM JAPAN



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The nuclear safety agency said TEPCO had been considering several measures such as spraying water and boric acid by helicopters and fire trucks into No. 4 to prevent spent fuel rods from reaching criticality again before work there was suspended.

The Wednesday fire comes a day after the plant was hit by a third explosion at one reactor and the fire at the fuel storage pool atop No. 4.

The agency also said Wednesday that about 70 per cent of the nuclear fuel rods at another of the Daiichi reactors may have been damaged.

Spokesman Minoru Ohgoda said the damage occurred at reactor No. 1. But he said "we don't know the nature of the damage, and it could be either melting, or there might be some holes in them."

On Tuesday, more than 200,000 people living near a quake-damaged nuclear plant in northeastern Japan were urged to leave the area or stay indoors after government officials raised concerns about radiation levels around the facility and workers dealt with more problems there.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan urged people to stay calm but said there was a "high risk" that more radioactive material will be released as workers struggle to prevent further explosions and leaks at the plant.

He reiterated the call for people living within 20 kilometres of the plant to leave the area, and advised people living within 30 kilometres of the plant to seal themselves indoors.

Japanese officials also introduced a 30-kilometre no-fly zone around the nuclear plant to prevent planes from spreading the radiation.



Seventy workers wearing protective gear have been at the complex, struggling with its myriad problems. They were being rotated in and out of the danger zone quickly to limit their radiation exposure.

Another 800 staff had earlier been evacuated from the site. The fires and explosions at the reactors have injured 15 workers and military personnel and exposed up to 190 people to elevated radiation.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said Tuesday it "remains concerned" over the situation at the plant, and is "seeking clarification on the nature and consequences" of the latest fire from Japanese officials.

Experts noted that much of the leaking radiation was apparently in steam from boiling water. It had not been emitted directly by fuel rods, which would be far more dangerous, they said.



A combination of handout satellite images shows the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant on Nov. 21, 2004, and on Monday. Reuters

After the Tuesday fire a Japanese official said the pool might still be boiling, though the reported levels of radiation had dropped dramatically by the end of the day.

Fourteen pumps have been brought in to get seawater into the reactors. They are not yet pumping water into reactor No. 4 but are trying to figure out how to do that.

Temperatures in at least two of the plant reactors, No. 5 and No. 6, were also slightly elevated.

"It's not good, but I don't think it's a disaster," said Steve Crossley, an Australia-based radiation physicist.

Even the highest detected rates were not automatically harmful for brief periods, he said.

Japanese officials had previously said radiation levels at the plant were within safe limits, and international scientists said that while there were serious dangers, there was little risk of a catastrophe like Chernobyl in Ukraine.

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USAssimilation

2011/03/17
at 2:37 PM ET

NO amount of radioactivity is ever "safe" to anyone or anything IMO. I don't care what they experts say.

All that radiation on its way across Canada will end up in the sea, sea life, water supply, EVERYTHING, and eventually end up not only on us but inside us on top of all the other toxins we ingest daily that all add up to more cancers & disease.

Nuclear energy is nothing but a toxic never ending money pit from the day it is built to the day your town is chosen as a burial site for its toxic waste.

Rating
-5

9	14
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uncreative zen

2011/03/16
at 4:54 PM ET

Dave7772011/03/16
at 12:27 AM ET

"So you know the USA has similar designs in production in the USA and China. Yes, China uses GE engineering!!! And they are building 50+ of them potential disasters."

WRONG

China does not use GE nuclear reactors.

They use Canadian and French reactors. The Canadian CANDU reactors are much safer because heavy water is used to "burn" natural uranium, whereas all other reactors "burn" enriched uranium 235.

As an ex-engineering member of the CANDU team, I will give you some useful information here:

Natural uranium which is mostly U-238 cannot sustain a chain reaction by itself without PURE heavy water which must be about 99.97% pure. If the heavy water is diluted, it will gradually lost power (ie, wont produce as much heat for the steam turbines) and the chain reaction eventually dies. Thus, in a CANDU reactor, if the operator drains the heavy water, or even uses diluted heavy water, the natural uranium in the reactor will not "burn", not to say a "meltdown". It is for this reason that the CANDU is a much safer design.

U235 by itself can sustain a chain reaction (to the point of an atomic bomb explosion if it is sufficiently pure). In a non-CANDU reactor, you need graphite to slow down the chain reaction and light water to carry the heat away. If you lost any of these two, the fuel will continue to burn by itself, heat will build up and you get a meltdown.

Rating
11

12	1
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olderhandirt

2011/03/16
at 1:45 PM ET

Freethinker at 3:18pm: That's very interesting.

Not being in the scientific field, I have now way of knowing about alternatives.

I agree completely that the essence of our energy predicament (besides our ridiculous appetite for energy hogs and various trinkets) is there would be a decrease in profit with the units described. Once again, let us chorus - there is no place for private ownership in essential services including utilities!

Rating
2

3	1
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CarloswhatdoUC

2011/03/16
at 11:30 AM ET

Regarding this critical and world changing (from the point of humans) event.

I give my heartfelt gratitude to the workers who with bravery and patriotism sacrifice their lives for the betterment of the country and the world. It truly is a selfless Japanese trait that would allow such sacrifice. Good luck, God speed because we are all at risk if you do not succeed.

As for the activity on the Pacific Plate there is certainly is troubling because it's just a matter of time for the Juan DaFuca to shift causing a similar west coast disaster. They say every 300 years and it has been 311 years since the last one.

As for the nuclear plant owners and Government shame for building such a piece of junk.

Rating
0

2	2
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Joe Calgarian

2011/03/16
at 8:10 AM ET

So um, er.....anyone working on nuclear fusion anymore???

Rating
-3

2	5
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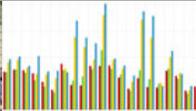
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