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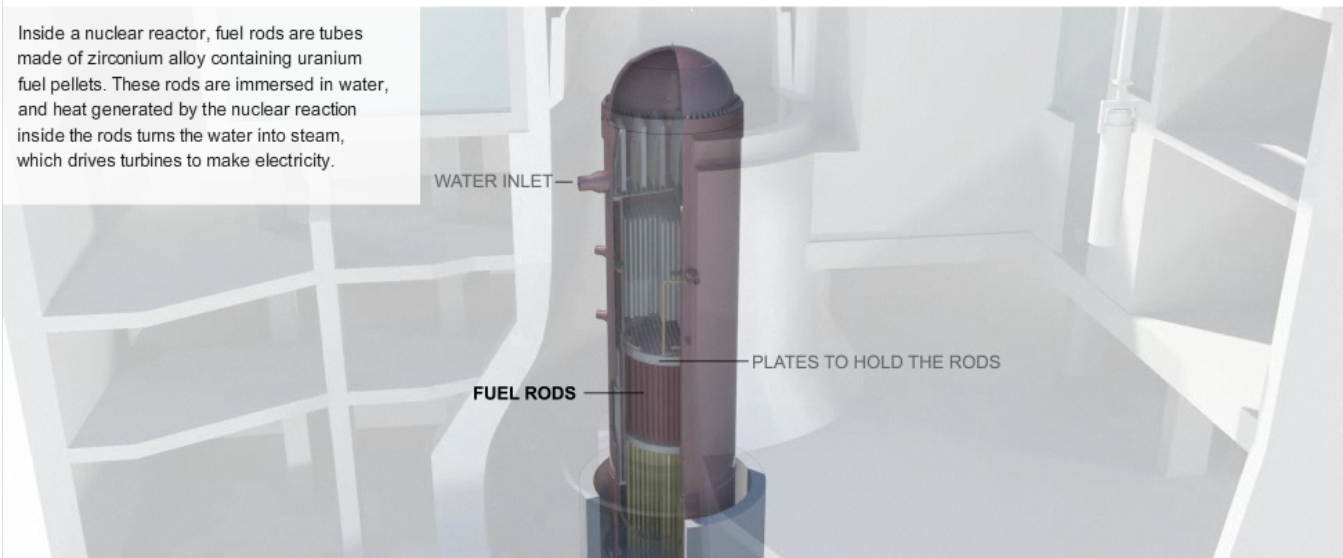
UPDATED March 24, 2011

## How a Reactor Shuts Down and What Happens in a Meltdown

The operating reactors at Fukushima Daiichi power station automatically shut down during the earthquake. But after cooling failures, two of them went into partial meltdown.

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Inside a nuclear reactor, fuel rods are tubes made of zirconium alloy containing uranium fuel pellets. These rods are immersed in water, and heat generated by the nuclear reaction inside the rods turns the water into steam, which drives turbines to make electricity.



By XAQUÍN G.V., BILL MARSH, DYLAN McCLAIN and GRAHAM ROBERTS | [Send Feedback](#)

Sources: Nuclear Energy Institute; David A. Lochbaum, Union of Concerned Scientists; Margaret Harding, 4 Factor Consulting; Arnold Gunderson, Fairwinds Associates; International Atomic Energy Agency

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