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 June 15-16, 2011
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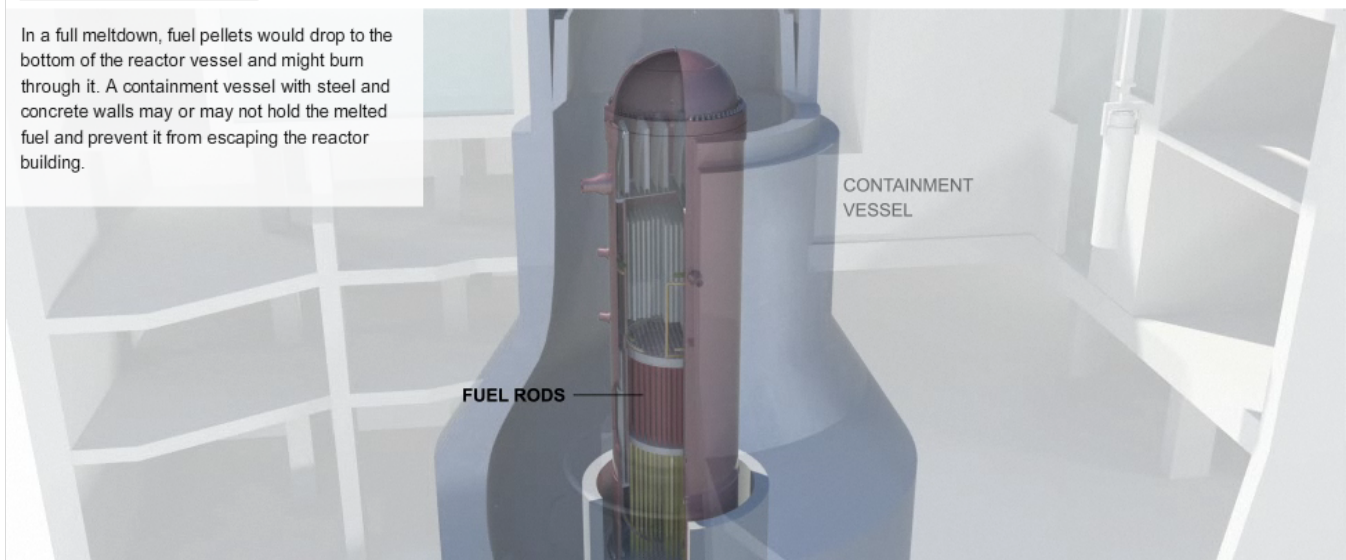
UPDATED March 24, 2011

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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In a full meltdown, fuel pellets would drop to the bottom of the reactor vessel and might burn through it. A containment vessel with steel and concrete walls may or may not hold the melted fuel and prevent it from escaping the reactor building.



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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