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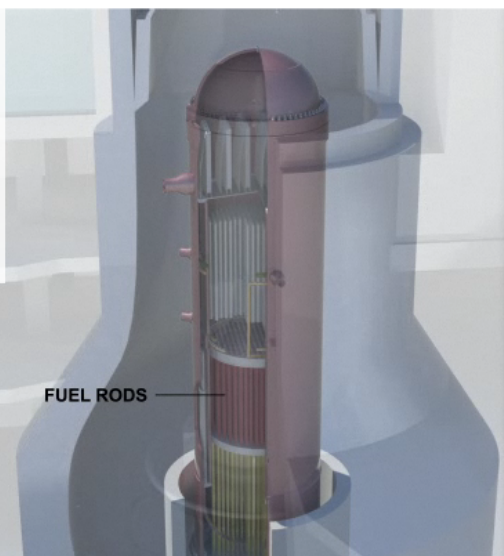
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How a Reactor Shuts Down and What Happens in a Meltdown

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 1979, the cooling system failed at the Three Mile Island plant, causing a partial meltdown of the reactor core. The reactor vessel was not breached. In Chernobyl in 1986, a poorly designed test of the cooling system caused a huge power spike and the reactor exploded. There was no containment vessel, so radioactive gases and materials were spewed into the atmosphere.



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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