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IAEA mission: Japan underestimated tsunami risk

02 June 2011

An International Atomic Energy Agency factfinding mission to Japan following the March earthquake and tsunami, has issued a draft preliminary assessment of the trip.

"Our entire team was humbled by the enormous damage inflicted by the tsunami on Japan. We are also profoundly impressed by the dedication of Japanese workers working to resolve this unprecedented nuclear accident," said team leader Mike Weightman, the United Kingdom's Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations.

The expert team published several preliminary findings:

- Japan's response to the nuclear accident has been exemplary, particularly illustrated by the dedicated, determined and expert staff working under exceptional circumstances;
- Japan's long-term response, including the evacuation of the area around stricken reactors, has been impressive and well organized. A suitable and timely follow-up programme on public and worker exposures and health monitoring would be beneficial;
- Defence in depth, physical separation, diversity and redundancy requirements should be applied for extreme external events, particularly those with common mode implications such as extreme floods.
- The tsunami hazard for several sites was underestimated. Nuclear plant designers and operators should appropriately evaluate and protect against the risks of all natural hazards, and should periodically update those assessments and assessment methodologies;
- Nuclear regulatory systems should address extreme events adequately, including their periodic review, and should ensure that regulatory independence and clarity of roles are preserved; and
- The Japanese accident demonstrates the value of hardened on-site Emergency Response Centres with adequate provisions for handling all necessary emergency roles, including communications.

The team - created by an agreement of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Government of Japan - sought to identify lessons learned from the accident that can help improve nuclear safety around the world.

To conduct its work, the team held extensive discussions with officials from the full range of Japanese nuclear-related agencies and visited three nuclear sites, including the nuclear power plant at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi. These visits gave the team a first-hand appreciation of the scale of devastation wreaked by the earthquake and tsunami on 11 March and of

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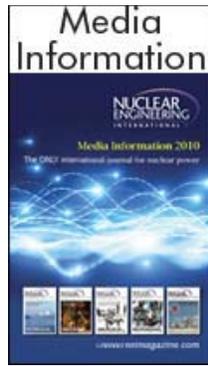
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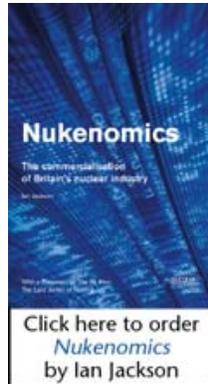
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the extraordinary efforts Japanese workers have been applying ever since to stabilize the situation.

"I appreciate the high level of cooperation and access that our team has received from Japan, as the devastating natural events and subsequent accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi have provided a unique opportunity for learning," Weightman said. "It is of fundamental importance for all with responsibility for nuclear safety across the world to seek to learn from this unique event."

The final report will be delivered to the Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety at IAEA headquarters in Vienna from 20 to 24 June.



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