

Subject: Update: No end in sight for Japan nuclear crisis
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Dear Rosalind,

It's hard to believe that this week marks nearly a month since Japan was hit by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake, followed by the tsunami and the ensuing nuclear reactor and radioactive waste disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi site.

While Friends of the Earth has been focused on the unfolding nuclear crisis, we cannot lose track of the human toll this series of disasters has wreaked on the people of Japan. As of Saturday, Japan's National Police Agency reported 11,938 people confirmed dead while 15,478 were still missing. Evacuations have displaced more than 164,200 people. (To keep updated on the humanitarian crisis, read [Friends of the Earth Japan's blog](#) on rebuilding after this disaster.)

Compounding this already immense human toll is the continuing disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor site. And I wish I had better news. According to the chairman of the French Nuclear Safety Authority, **gaining control of the reactors and waste ponds at Fukushima will likely require "months" of work, while managing the contamination outside the plant "is a question of years if not of decades."**

Over the past two weeks, TEPCO, the utility responsible for operating the six nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi site, reportedly attached power lines to the reactor facility to replace the temporary generators being used as a last resort. Having a steady power source is the first step to restarting the systems needed to cool down the crippled reactors as well as the spent fuel pools. Unfortunately, hydrogen explosions, fires, the use of salt water and boric acid for emergency cooling, and the heat and radiation produced by the partial melting of nuclear fuel have together inflicted extensive damage. Equipment needs to be replaced or repaired for workers to have any hope of restarting cooling systems. In the meantime, the U.S. Navy is barging fresh water to the nuclear site, where it is being pumped into the damaged reactors and spent fuel pools.

While TEPCO struggles to gain control, **we are beginning to get a true sense of the radiation impacts of the disaster.** Heightened levels of radioactive iodine-131 have been detected in drinking water in Tokyo and in Fukushima prefecture. Spinach and milk as far as 75 miles away from the reactors have been found to



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[See updates on the crisis in Japan and our response.](#)

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exceed safety limits for radioactive iodine. In addition, recent reports indicate that levels of radioactive contamination in ocean waters surrounding Fukushima Daiichi have [risen as high as 7.5 million times the legal limit](#).

This ocean contamination is likely caused by radioactive steam releases and run-off from the emergency spraying of salt water onto the reactors and spent fuel pools -- **as well as by TEPCO's [unprecedented dumping of more than 11,500 tons of radioactive waste water into the ocean, which began on Monday with clearance from the Japanese government](#)**. Japan is a party to the London Convention, which bans the dumping of nuclear waste at sea, and would be prohibited from dumping even a barrel of this waste from a ship. But, remarkably, a loophole in that agreement allows the same nuclear waste to be dumped from a "land-based" source like the Fukushima site. The impacts of this dumping and the ongoing radiation releases into the marine environment are largely unknown.

We are also beginning to see **the spread of the radiation in the United States**. Increased levels of radiation have registered in California, Pennsylvania and Virginia, to name a few states. Radioactive iodine was discovered at low levels in milk samples taken last week in Spokane, Washington. And the government of Virginia [notified its residents](#) that, "out of an abundance of caution they should avoid using rainwater collected in cisterns as drinking water." If you are concerned about radiation exposure and health impacts, some helpful information is available in this [fact sheet by Physicians for Social Responsibility](#).

The international and U.S. response to the nuclear disaster in Japan has been mixed. The German government has committed to closing seven reactors immediately and is [under pressure](#) to rededicate itself to ending its reliance on nuclear reactors altogether. The Italian government has [put a one-year moratorium in place](#) until the lessons from Japan can be assessed. And the government of South Korea has [formally complained to Japan](#) about its dumping of nuclear waste water into the open ocean.

Unfortunately, in the U.S., **we have a lot of work to do to convince politicians to phase out this dangerous industry and focus on truly clean and safe alternatives**. Amidst the crisis in Japan, President Obama has re-emphasized his support for nuclear reactors, and still wants to put billions of our tax dollars on the hook to bail out reactor construction. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission announced a 90-day review of U.S. reactors and an assessment of the Japanese disaster, but quickly turned around and [relicensed the 40-year-old Vermont Yankee nuclear plant](#), which uses the same design and type of reactor in trouble at Fukushima.

But with your help, we are making headway. More than 11,500 Friends of the Earth activists have written to their members of Congress calling for an immediate halt to reactor construction and, ultimately, an end to nuclear power in the U.S. (If you haven't taken action yet, you can join them by [clicking here](#).) And Friends of the Earth's seasoned anti-nuclear campaigners are hard at work amplifying your voices. Through advocacy in the media, in Congress, and on the ground in South Carolina and Georgia, we are organizing resistance to new reactors and pushing for action to phase out aging reactors that put communities in danger.

Going forward, the staff at Friends of the Earth will continue to monitor the situation in Japan and come back to you with new ways to take action. We have been taking your questions (and there have been a lot!) and are doing our best to reply to your messages. We are considering a telephone briefing for members and activists -- [if this is something you would be interested in, please let us know](#).

Thank you for your support throughout this crisis. Working together, we will hold the nuclear industry accountable and advance our positive vision for a nuclear-free, safe energy future.

**Regards,
Erich Pica**

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Friends of the Earth is fighting to defend the environment and create a more healthy and just world.

Our current campaigns focus on promoting clean energy and solutions to climate change, keeping toxic and risky technologies out of the food we eat and products we use, and protecting marine ecosystems and the people who live and work near them.

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