

Fukushima Disaster, Joint Law Suit Filed: 1,400 Sue General Electric, Toshiba and Hitachi

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Will the Builders of Unsafe Nuclear Reactors Finally Face Scrutiny?

We've previously noted that General Electric should be held partially responsible for the Fukushima reactor because [General Electric knew](#) that its reactors were unsafe:

5 of the 6 nuclear reactors at Fukushima are General Electric Mark 1 reactors.

GE knew decades ago that the design was faulty.

ABC News [reported](#) in 2011:

Thirty-five years ago, Dale G. Bridenbaugh and two of his colleagues at General Electric resigned from their jobs after becoming increasingly convinced that the nuclear reactor design they were reviewing — the Mark 1 — was so flawed it could lead to a devastating accident.

Questions persisted for decades about the ability of the Mark 1 to handle the immense pressures that would result if the reactor lost cooling power, and today that design is being put to the ultimate test in Japan. Five of the six reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, which has been wracked since Friday's earthquake with explosions and radiation leaks, are Mark 1s.

"The problems we identified in 1975 were that, in doing the design of the containment, they did not take into account the dynamic loads that could be experienced with a loss of coolant," Bridenbaugh told ABC News in an interview. "The impact loads the containment would receive by this very rapid release of energy could tear the containment apart and create an uncontrolled release."

Still, concerns about the Mark 1 design have resurfaced occasionally in the years since Bridenbaugh came forward. In 1986, for instance, Harold Denton, then the director of NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, spoke critically about the design during an industry conference.

"I don't have the same warm feeling about GE containment that I do about the larger dry containments," he said, according to a report at the time that was referenced Tuesday in The Washington Post.

"There is a wide spectrum of ability to cope with severe accidents at GE plants," Denton said. "And I urge you to think seriously about the ability to cope with such an event if it occurred at your plant."

When asked if [the remedial measures performed on the Fukushima reactors by GE before 2011] was sufficient, he paused. “What I would say is, the Mark 1 is still a little more susceptible to an accident that would result in a loss of containment.”

The New York Times [reported](#) that other government officials warned about the dangers inherent in GE’s Mark 1 design:

In 1972, Stephen H. Hanauer, then a safety official with the Atomic Energy Commission, recommended that the Mark 1 system be discontinued because it presented unacceptable safety risks. Among the concerns cited was the smaller containment design, which was more susceptible to explosion and rupture from a buildup in hydrogen — a situation that may have unfolded at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. Later that same year, Joseph Hendrie, who would later become chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a successor agency to the atomic commission, said the idea of a ban on such systems was attractive. But the technology had been so widely accepted by the industry and regulatory officials, he said, that “reversal of this hallowed policy, particularly at this time, could well be the end of nuclear power.”

This faulty design has made the Fukushima disaster much worse.

Specifically, the [several reactors exploded](#) ... [scattering clumps of radioactive fuel far and wide](#).

In addition, the Mark 1 included an *absolutely insane* design element: storing huge quantities of radioactive fuel rods 100 feet up in the air.

The Christian Science Monitor [noted](#):

A particular feature of the 40-year old General Electric Mark 1 Boiling Water Reactor model – such as the six reactors at the Fukushima site – is that each reactor has a separate spent-fuel pool. These sit near the top of each reactor and adjacent to it

Indeed, the fuel pools have caught fires several times, and now [constitute an enormous danger](#). [[More](#).]

Heck of a job, GE ...

Unfortunately, there are [23 virtually-identical GE Mark 1 reactors](#) in the U.S.

This is not to say that Tepco and the Japanese government are not to blame also. [They are](#).

But GE and the [American government](#) are largely responsible as well.

Greenpeace [pointed out](#) in in 2013:

Former Babcock-Hitachi engineer Mitsuhiro Tanaka said in a [Greenpeace video](#) about a flawed reactor vessel Hitachi made for Fukushima: “when the stakes are raised to such a height, a company will not choose what is safe and legal. Even if it is dangerous they will choose to save the company from destruction.”

A 1,400-person lawsuit has just been filed to hold GE – as well as the 2 other companies responsible for Fukushima reactor construction, Hitachi and Toshiba – responsible.

AP [reports](#):

About 1,400 people filed a joint lawsuit Thursday against three companies that manufactured reactors at Japan’s Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant

The 1,415 plaintiffs, including 38 Fukushima residents and 357 people from outside Japan, said the manufacturers — Toshiba, GE and Hitachi — failed to make needed safety improvements to the four decade-old reactors at the Fukushima plant

Are they doing it for the money?

[Nope](#):

They are seeking compensation of 100 yen (\$1) each, saying their main goal is to raise awareness of the problem.

Postscript: If these companies are not held accountable, they will do it again and again. For example, the Department of Justice [announced](#) earlier this month:

General Electric Hitachi Nuclear Energy Americas LLC (GE Hitachi) has agreed to pay \$2.7 million to resolve allegations under the False Claims Act that it made false statements and claims to the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) concerning an advanced nuclear reactor design. GE Hitachi, a provider of nuclear energy products and services headquartered in Wilmington, N.C., is a subsidiary of General Electric Company (GE) that is also partially owned by Hitachi Ltd., a multinational engineering and manufacturing firm headquartered in Tokyo, Japan. GE is headquartered in Fairfield, Conn.

The government alleged that GE Hitachi concealed known flaws in its steam dryer analysis and falsely represented that it had properly analyzed the steam dryer in accordance with applicable standards and had verified the accuracy of its modeling using reliable data.

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