

Fukushima Out of Control: Radiation Levels Significantly Higher than “Unimaginable”

Still Getting Worse After Six Years of Meltdowns

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After a week of limited coverage of “unimaginable levels” of radiation inside the remains of collapsed Unit 2 at Fukushima (see below), [Nuclear-News.net](#) reported February 11 that radiation levels are actually significantly higher than “unimaginable.”

Continuous, intense radiation, at 530 sieverts an hour (4 sieverts is a lethal level), was widely reported in early February 2017 – as if this were a new phenomenon. It’s not. Three reactors at Fukushima melted down during the earthquake-tsunami disaster on March 3, 2011, and the meltdowns never stopped. Radiation levels have been out of control ever since. As Fairewinds Energy Education noted in an email February 10:

Although this robotic measurement just occurred, this high radiation reading was anticipated and has existed inside the damaged Unit 2 atomic reactor since the disaster began nearly 6 years ago.... As Fairewinds has said for 6 years, there are no easy solutions because groundwater is in direct contact with the nuclear corium (melted fuel) at Fukushima Daiichi.

What’s new (and not very new, at that) is the official acknowledgement of the highest radiation levels yet measured there, by a factor of seven (the previously measured high was 73 sieverts an hour in 2012). The highest radiation level measured at Chernobyl was 300 sieverts an hour. What this all means, as anyone paying attention well knows, is that the triple-meltdown Fukushima disaster is still out of control.



IAEA fact-finding team examines devastation at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in May 2011. (photo: IAEA/Greg Webb)

“Sievert” is one of the many [terms of mystification](#) used to prevent most people from fully understanding radiation. A “sievert” is roughly equivalent to a “gray,” as each represents a “joule” per kilogram (not to be confused, for example, with “Curie” or Bequerel,” or with “rem,” “rad,” or “roentgen”). In the International System of Units (SI), a “joule” is the “unit of work or energy, equal to the work done by a force of one newton when its point of application moves one meter in the direction of action of the force, equivalent to one 3600th of a watt-hour.” Got that? The jargon doesn’t much matter as far as public safety is concerned. [All ionizing radiation is life-threatening](#). The more you’re exposed, the more you’re threatened. As [Physics Stack Exchange](#) illustrates the issue:

The dose [of radiation] that kills a tumor is deliberately aimed at that tumor. If, instead of using a collimated beam, you put a person in a wide beam for radio “therapy”, you would be treating their entire body as a tumor and kill them.

Radiation levels at Fukushima are [comparable to a nuclear explosion](#) that doesn’t end. That’s one reason that TEPCO, the Tokyo Electric Power Co. that owns Fukushima, keeps trying to reassure the world that little or no radiation escapes from Fukushima. This is not true, radiation in large, mostly unmeasured or undocumented amounts pours into the Pacific Ocean all the time, without pause. One reason this release is out of control is because no one apparently knows just where the three melted reactor cores have gone. TEPCO says it thinks the melted cores have burned through the reactors’ inner containment vessels, but are still within the outer containment walls. They keep looking as best they can.

On February 3, 2017, [the Guardian reported](#) the high radiation levels discovered by a remote camera sent into the reactor on a telescopic arm. [Reader Supported News](#) carried the story from EcoWatch on February 5. [Essentially the same story](#) was reported on February 6 by Smithsonian.com, on February 7 by [ZeroHedge.com](#), and on February 8, [Fox News reported](#) that “radiation levels at Japan’s crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant are now at ‘unimaginable’ levels.” There have apparently been no such reports on CBS, NBC, CNN, or MSNBC. On February 9, [ABC ran an AP story](#) about pulling a robot out of Unit 2 because of “high radiation,” without specifying a level and adding: “TEPCO officials reassured that despite the dangerously high figures, radiation is not leaking outside of the reactor.” ([PJMedia.com](#) calls the Fox story “fake news,” relies on ad hominem argument, trusts TEPCO on keeping track of the irradiated ocean flow, and accepts US EPA standards for “safe” drinking water – without actually discrediting the story.)

On February 12, [Pakistan Defence ran the AP story](#) of February 9, but included the new level of radiation at 650 sieverts that [fried a robot’s camera](#), adding:

The high levels of radiation may seem alarming, but there’s good news: it’s contained, and there are no reports of new leaks from the plant. That means that the radiation shouldn’t affect nearby townships. Higher levels of radiation could also mean the robot is getting closer to the precise source of radioactivity to properly remove the melted fuel.

All this coverage relates only to Unit 2’s melted reactor core. There is no reliable news of the condition of the melted reactor cores in two other units. Last November, in a half-hour

talk [reviewing the Fukushima crisis](#), Arnie Gunderson of [Fairewinds Energy Education](#) discussed the three missing reactor cores and what he suspected was the likelihood that they had not been contained within the reactor.

The ground water flowing into, through, and out of the reactor is contaminated by its passage and is having some impact on the Pacific Ocean. The US, like other governments, is ignoring whatever is happening, allowing it to happen as if it doesn't matter and never will. In [Carmel, California](#), local residents are finding that tide pools, once vibrant with life, are now dead. [They blame Fukushima](#).

[Whatever is actually going on](#) at Fukushima is not good, and has horrifying possibilities. It is little comfort to have the perpetrator of the catastrophe, TEPCO, in charge of fixing it, especially when the Japanese government is more an enabler of cover-up and denial than any kind of seeker of truth or protector of its people. It took [private researchers](#) five years to figure out that Fukushima's [fallout of Cesium-137](#) on Tokyo took a more dangerous, glassy form that wasn't cleaned up effectively.

The US and most of the rest of the world have chosen not to take Fukushima more seriously than a multi-car Interstate pile-up. The policy is one more roll of the dice, saving money now and gambling the future. But now we have Rick Perry heading up the US Department of Energy and Scott Pruitt slated to take over the Environmental Protection Agency – so we can expect big changes, right?

Actually there has been one big change already at the Energy Dept., which [uses more contractors](#) than any other US agency. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the Energy Dept. [failed to protect whistleblowers](#) who raised legitimate nuclear safety and other concerns. In response, the Energy Dept. prepared a new rule protecting whistleblowers from contractor retaliation. That rule was blocked from going into effect by President [Trump's regulatory freeze](#) on January 20.

In a sense, Fukushima is perhaps a metaphor for the current American moment. The electoral earthquake and tsunami of 11/9 has produced a political meltdown of unknown and expanding proportions, that continue unchecked, causing still unmeasured destruction and human suffering far into a dark and dangerous future.

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