

Meanwhile, in Fukushima...

Rising radiation levels

By [James Corbett](#)

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Welcome. This is James Corbett of [corbettreport.com](#) with your [Sunday Update](#) for this 15th day of May, 2011. And now for the real news.

A series of worrying incidents at the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has drawn the eyes of the international media away from the Osama Bin Laden spectacle and back toward northeastern Japan this week. In a string of increasingly alarming reports, every one of the troubled reactors at the site faced major new setbacks this week as the Tokyo Electric Power Co and the Japanese government struggled to maintain the appearance that the situation was under control.

After admitting that radiation levels in the building housing Reactor number 1 had reached [700 millisieverts per hour](#) on Monday, TEPCO was forced to concede on Thursday that the reactor core has in fact been [exposed and melted down](#), causing a leak in the containment vessel itself. This not only poses greater likelihood of contamination of groundwater, but makes it even more difficult to continue cooling operations. As one nuclear adviser noted, TEPCO's current operation of flooding the core must now be scrapped, as large amounts of cold water hitting melted fuel could [trigger another explosion](#), causing a further massive atmospheric radiation release.

Meanwhile, [a new leak was found](#) at reactor number 3 this week, and an unknown amount of radioactive material was confirmed to have leaked into the ocean. This leak was reportedly sealed by Wednesday.

On Tuesday the Japanese government [confirmed](#) that the number 4 reactor building was leaning and that emergency work had been done to shore up the building to prevent it from collapsing in the event of another earthquake or aftershock. Reactor 4 contains fuel rods from 3 to 4 reactors, [leading to worries](#) that a building collapse would lead to spent fuel rods being scattered around the Fukushima site, making the entire area unworkable.

As nuclear engineer [Arnold Gunderson notes](#), the admissions of containment vessel leaks in three of the reactors represents a turn of events that nuclear regulators in the United States have [previously thought impossible](#).

In the latest setback, one of the plant workers [collapsed and died](#) shortly after beginning his

shift at the Fukushima plant on Saturday. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

Confidence in the Japanese government's ability to respond to the unfolding catastrophe slipped even further this week, as it was revealed this week that the prefectural government appears to have [failed to notify 4 of the towns](#) in the vicinity of the Fukushima plant that there had been a nuclear accident following the March 11th earthquake and tsunami. The government is connected to all six towns within 10 km of the plants via special digital communication lines, and is obligated to inform the town governments in the wake of any nuclear emergency. However, records released this week show that the government only contacted two of the towns in the vicinity, and neglected to inform the other four. Two of the towns that were not notified learned of the accident via tv news reports and concluded that it was necessary to evacuate residents.

Meanwhile, TEPCO has announced that its latest plan to prevent further release of radioactive materials from the plant is to cover the damaged reactor buildings with [giant polyester covers](#).

Now, tempers are flaring over news that TEPCO has [reached a deal](#) to secure billions of dollars in government aid to help cover the costs of the cleanup and to compensate victims of the accident. As journalist [Yoichi Shimatsu notes](#), the package is being sold to the public as emergency assistance to the victims, but in reality is a bailout of TEPCO with government funds under fraudulent pretenses.

"One thing is certain," Shimatsu writes in his latest report. "The burden for Tepco's malfeasance will fall on taxpayers and consumers. Despite official claims that the bailout will not trigger higher taxes or electricity prices, Tepco has already raised household power rates in May, stealthily by lower discounts for households, and the government is preparing to raise the consumer sales tax to 8 percent from the current 3.5 percent. Insiders are predicting a 16 percent electricity rate hike spread over the next decade."

Now, signs that the traditionally reserved Japanese public have become fed up with government lies and obfuscation are beginning to emerge.

Last week furious Fukushima-area parents [staged protests](#) over government action to raise acceptable radiation levels for children to 20 times previous levels in order to stop schools from being closed. High levels of radioactivity have been found in school playgrounds as far as 60 km away from the plant.

In the latest sign of growing unrest, anti-nuclear protesters [clashed with police](#) in a demonstration in Tokyo's crowded Shibuya district last Saturday.



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