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The Secret "Good News" from Fukushima

By Washington's Blog
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Fukushima Proved that Dry Casks *Work*

Many *bad* secrets have been revealed about Fukushima.

For example:

- Plant operator Tepco just admitted that it's known for 2 years that massive amounts of radioactive water are leaking into the groundwater and Pacific Ocean
- Tepco, the Japanese government and the U.S. knew right after the 2011 accident that 3 nuclear reactors had lost containment, that the nuclear fuel had "gone missing", and that there was in fact no real containment at all
- The Fukushima reactors were fatally damaged *before* the tsunami hit ... the earthquake took them out even before the tidal wave hit
- Engineers warned Tepco and the Japanese government *many years* before the accident that the reactors were seismically unsafe ... and that an earthquake could wipe them out
- Tepco – with no financial incentive to actually fix things – has only been *pretending* to clean it up. And see this
- Technology doesn't currently even *exist* to stabilize and clean up Fukushima. Indeed, Tepco's recent attempts to solidify the ground under the reactors using chemicals has backfired horribly. And NBC News notes: "[Tepco] is considering freezing the ground around the plant. Essentially building a mile-long ice wall underground, something that's never been tried before to keep the water out. One scientist I spoke to dismissed this idea as grasping at straws, just more evidence that the power company failed to anticipate this problem ... and now cannot solve it."
- An accident in the U.S. could be a lot larger than in Japan ... partly because our nuclear plants hold a *lot* more radioactive material
- An official Japanese government investigation concluded that the Fukushima accident was a "man-made" disaster, caused by "collusion" between government and Tepco and bad reactor design

- But it is the *American* government which is calling the shots in terms of Japanese nuclear policy ... and has been for many decades

But there is some secret *good* news from Fukushima.

For example, Alternet reported last year:

> [Robert Alvarez, a nuclear waste expert and former senior adviser to the Secretary of Energy during the Clinton administration] pointed out that the contents of the nine dry casks at the Fukushima Daiichi site were undamaged by the disaster.
>
> "Nobody paid much attention to that fact," Alvarez said. "I've never seen anybody at Tepco or anyone [at the NRC or in the nuclear industry] saying, 'Well, thank god for the dry casks. They were untouched.' They don't say a word about it."

What's he talking about?

David Lochbaum – Director of the Nuclear Safety Project for the Union of Concerned Scientists, who worked as a nuclear engineer for nearly two decades, and has written numerous articles and reports on various aspects of nuclear safety and published two books – explained to Washington's Blog:

> [Q] I understand the U.S. reactors actually hold a lot more spent radioactive fuel in their fuel pools than the reactors at Fukushima?
>
> [A] Right.
>
> [Q] And so a meltdown could be more dangerous here, hypothetically.
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> [A] Yes, that's true.
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> [Q] Is dry cask the way to go?
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> [A] Yes. In fact, one of the secrets of Fukushima we're trying to expose is that there were 408 fuel cells in dry cask storage at Fukushima. The building they were housed in was not much above the water level. The building and the dry casks were submerged when the tsunami hit. During that period, the water was providing the cooling that air normally does. Once the tsunami waters receded, the air cooling picked right back up. It's the chimney effect. There's no moving parts.
>
> You don't need pumps, you don't need helicopters dropping water ... you just need nature.
>
> It's not absolutely safe, but until we figure out what to do with this long-term, it's a much better, more secure place to store it than in pools.

Indeed, a 5.8 earthquake hit the North Anna nuclear reactor in Virginia ... and caused the dry cask storage units – containing radioactive waste – to move. But they protected the waste, and prevented leaks.

Likewise, when the Fort Calhoun nuclear plant was flooded in 2011, the dry casks rode out the flood without damage.

The former head of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said in April:

> Dry casks work very well as far as we know.

As we've previously noted:

> Apologists for the nuclear power industry pretend there are no better alternatives, so we just have to suck it up and suffer through the Japanese nuclear crisis.
>
> But this is wholly illogical. The truth is that we can store spent fuel rods in dry cask storage, which is much safer than the spent fuel rod pools used in Fukushima and many American reactors.
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> As the Nation pointed out:
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> > Short of closing plants, there is a fairly reliable solution to the problem of spent fuel rods. It is called "dry cask storage."
> >
> > ***
> >
> > But there is a problem with dry cask storage: it costs money….

Get it? The Japanese and American governments are playing Russian roulette with the spent nuclear fuel at Fukushima and throughout the U.S. to save nuclear companies from having to spend a couple of million dollars to safely store spent fuel in dry casks.

Nuclear can be safe ... if the money is spent to maintain it properly. If not, you get Fukushima.

Alternet pointed out last year:

> Experts say the only near-term answer to better protect our nation's existing spent nuclear fuel is dry cask storage. But there's one catch: the nuclear industry doesn't want to incur the expense, which is about $1 million per cask.
>
> "So now they're stuck," said Alvarez, "The NRC has made this policy decision, which the industry is very violently opposed to changing because it saves them a ton of money. And if they have to go to dry hardened storage onsite, they're going to have to fork over several hundred million dollars per reactor to do this."

The American government has for decades *wholly subsidized* nuclear power.

The government is printing trillions of dollars to bail out banks around the world.

And yet it can't demand that nuclear power companies spend a couple of hundred millions to use dry cask storage to keep spent fuel safe ... or print the money to buy them itself?

Or to otherwise protect nuclear plants from known risks? (Remember, a nuclear accident in the U.S. could cost trillions of dollars ... and bankrupt our country.)

Then what is government *for*?

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