



Fukushima Nuclear Crisis Needs Urgent Attention

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The Japanese government has belatedly admitted that the Fukushima nuclear crisis is the most dangerous it's been since three of the reactors melted down after the 2011 tsunami. After denying for months that radioactive water was leaking into the Pacific ocean, Tepco, the well-connected utility that runs the Fukushima nuclear plant, admitted last week that about 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from one of the thousand makeshift tanks the company had built near the shoreline to store radioactive water. It also admitted that some water had reached the ocean and other tanks are in danger of leaking.

China announced it was "shocked" at the news of the leak. The Japanese Trade Minister stated that Tepco has been using a "whack-a-mole" strategy in dealing with contaminated water, and the government announced it will take the lead with "emergency measures." Yet nothing fundamental has changed.

Tepco's tanks store over 300,000 tons of radioactive water. Another 400 tons are added every



day, some from groundwater flowing into the facility's basement and some from water used to cool the reactors and spent fuel. The radiation levels in the latest leaked water are so high that "a person standing close to it for an hour would receive five times the annual recommended limit for nuclear workers."

Tepeco has demonstrated a shockingly cavalier attitude about a series of leaks and management failures. It didn't test the ability of the tanks' rubber seals to withstand radiation. The tanks lack water gauges to monitor leaks. The company assigned only two workers to check the nearly 1,000 tanks—on two-hour patrols twice a day—without any tools to measure radiation or any duty to keep normal inspection logs.

Before the latest leak, the Japanese government had banned the export and domestic sale of most fish caught off the Fukushima coast, devastating fishermen's livelihoods. But radiation from Fukushima isn't confined to Japan. "Radionuclides have been detected in U.S seaweed, California bluefin tuna, rainwater, groundwater, topsoil, dairy and agricultural products." Stanford University researchers found radiation from Fukushima in 100% of bluefin tuna caught off the California coast. Experts are concerned that radioactive isotopes like strontium-90 are "entering the ocean at levels that will accumulate in seafood and will cause new health concerns."

The American Medical Association has adopted a resolution calling on the U.S. government to test all U.S. seafood for radiation. The National Academy of Sciences has said that there is no safe level of radiation.

Last March, John Rowe, the newly-retired CEO of Exelon, America's largest nuclear power producer, said that nuclear power is no longer an economically viable source of new energy in the United States. "Let me state unequivocally that I've never met a nuclear plant I didn't like," he said. "Having said that, let me also state unequivocally that new ones don't make any sense right now.... I'm the nuclear guy. And you won't get better results with nuclear. It just isn't economic, and it's not economic within a foreseeable time frame."

We are paying a heavy price for our nuclear craze, as the Fukushima crisis demonstrates.

This map from the Chinese science journal Science China Earth Sciences shows the likely path of radioactive seawater from the Fukushima nuclear power disaster after 1.5 years (September, 2012) and after 3.5 years (September, 2014). Radioactive water continues to leak into the ocean today.