

THE FUKUSHIMA DISASTER

Nuclear-Free Campaign – Friends of the Earth Australia
www.nuclear.foe.org.au
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This is an outline of a detailed Friends of the Earth briefing paper, 'Japan's Nuclear Scandals and the Fukushima Disaster', March 2012, posted at www.nuclear.foe.org.au/power/#fukushima

The Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan in March 2011 involved nuclear reactor fuel meltdowns, explosions and fires. Consequences of the Fukushima disaster include:

- The World Health Organisation predicts an increase in the number of all solid cancers, breast cancer, leukaemia and thyroid cancer as a result of radioactive Fukushima fallout. Based on UN data on human radiation exposure, UK radiation biologist Dr Ian Fairlie estimates around 5,000 fatal cancers from Fukushima fallout.
- A September 2012 editorial in *Japan Times* noted that 1632 deaths occurred during or after evacuation from the triple-disaster; and nearly half of the 343,000 evacuees were dislocated specifically because of the nuclear disaster.
- Around 160,000 people were evacuated specifically because of the Fukushima accident. Around 50,000 people remain evacuated as of January 2018. Most of the remaining evacuees are still living in small temporary housing units.
- Direct and indirect costs of the disaster will be around US\$500 billion according to a study by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. The Japanese government estimates clean-up and compensation costs at A\$263 billion.

1. Safety breaches and cover-ups

The Japanese nuclear industry has been plagued by safety breaches, scandals, cover-ups, inadequate regulation and a myriad of other failings over a long period of time.

"It's a fact that there was an unreasonable overconfidence in the technology of Japan's nuclear power generation."

— Banri Kaieda, head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, June 2011

2. Corruption and collusion in Japan's 'nuclear village'

Japan's nuclear industry is run by a clique of public- and private-sector interests that promote personal and corporate gain at the expense of public safety.

"Just as in any Japanese village, the like-minded – nuclear industry officials, bureaucrats, politicians and scientists – have prospered by rewarding one another with construction projects, lucrative positions, and political, financial and regulatory support. The few openly skeptical of nuclear power's safety become village outcasts, losing out on promotions and backing."

— Norimitsu Onishi and Ken Belson, 26 April 2011, 'Culture of Complicity Tied to Stricken Nuclear Plant', New York Times.

3. Nuclear accidents in Japan

The collusive and sub-standard practices of Japan's nuclear industry led to numerous accidents before the Fukushima accident, and they were a root cause of the Fukushima accident itself. The 2012 report of Japan's Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) concluded that the Fukushima disaster was "a profoundly man-made disaster that could and should have been foreseen and prevented" if not for "a multitude of errors and wilful negligence that left the Fukushima plant unprepared for the events of March 11".

The NAIIC report further said that: "The accident was the result of collusion between the government, the regulators and TEPCO, and the lack of governance by said parties."

"Japan's nuclear officials have tried to juggle promotion and regulation but the result has been numerous accidents and troubles." — Kenji Sumita, former deputy chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission, 28 March 2011

4. Earthquake and tsunami risks

TEPCO (operator of the Fukushima plant) did not adequately protect against earthquake and tsunami risks, nor was it forced to by the government regulator.

"TEPCO did not implement measures against tsunami as part of its AM [Accident Management] strategy. Its preparedness for such accident as severe damage at the core of reactor as a result of natural disasters was quite insufficient."

-- Japanese government's Investigation Committee, December 2011

5. Responsibility for the Fukushima disaster

Primary responsibility for the disaster lies with TEPCO. Others are culpable including Japanese government agencies and regulators, and overseas suppliers who have turned a blind eye to serious problems in Japan's nuclear industry over a long period of time.

6. Australia's role in the Fukushima disaster

Australia's uranium mining industry has done nothing to try to rectify the patterns of unsafe mismanagement in Japan's nuclear industry, or the inadequate regulation. Successive Australian governments have been equally passive. Problems that industry and government have turned a blind eye to include:

- revelations in 2002 that TEPCO had systematically and routinely falsified safety data and breached safety regulations for 25 years or more;
- revelations in 2007 of over 300 incidents of 'malpractice' at Japan's nuclear plants;
- evidence that Japan's nuclear plants were poorly equipped to withstand earthquakes and tsunamis; and
- evidence of manifestly inadequate regulation.

"Japan is not the sole nation responsible for the current nuclear disaster. From the manufacture of the reactors by GE to provision of uranium by Canada, Australia and others, many nations are implicated."
-- Yuki Tanaka, 28 March 2011, The Atomic Bomb and "Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy", The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 9, Issue 13, No. 2.

Australian uranium was used in the Fukushima reactors. In 2011, Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner

Yvonne Margarula wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressing her sadness at the devastation that uranium from the Ranger uranium mine in the NT was causing in Japan. She wrote: "This is an industry we never supported in the past and want no part of in the future. We are all diminished by the events unfolding at Fukushima."

Appendix: Spinning Fukushima

The behaviour of Australia's nuclear apologists before, during and after the Fukushima disaster has been dishonest and disgraceful.

"The best place to be whenever there's an earthquake is at the perimeter of a nuclear plant because they are designed so well."

-- Ziggy Switkowski, 14 March 2011, ABC.

"There is no credible risk of a serious accident. The risk of meltdown is extremely small, and the death toll from any such accident, even if it occurred, will be zero. There will be no breach of containment and no release of radioactivity beyond, at the very most, some venting of mildly radioactive steam to relieve pressure. Those spreading FUD [fear, uncertainty and doubt] at the moment will be the ones left with egg on their faces. I am happy to be quoted forever after on the above if I am wrong ... but I won't be."

-- Prof. Barry Brook, written while nuclear meltdowns were in full swing in Fukushima reactors.

More information:

www.nuclear.foe.org.au/power/#fukushima

Citizens Nuclear Information Center (Japan):

www.cnic.jp/english

see esp. Fukushima section:

www.cnic.jp/english/?cat=24

www.fukuleaks.org/web