



# Nuclear Energy Information Service

*Illinois' Nuclear Power Watchdog since 1981*

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Japanese nuclear emergency – implications for Illinois, Nuclear Renaissance

#### Current accidents conditions worsening; residents around stricken reactor evacuated

**CHICAGO**—The record-setting 8.9 magnitude earthquake that struck Japan this morning has resulted in the shutdown of 10 reactors, fires at two and an ongoing state of emergency at one old reactor. The implications – like the resulting tsunami itself -- ripple far beyond the borders of Japan: they have serious consequences for the US and international nuclear industry as well, says an Illinois nuclear-power watchdog organization.

“These reactors are the same type and roughly the same vintage as the two Dresden and two Quad Cities reactors operating in Illinois,” notes Dave Kraft, director of the Chicago-based Nuclear Energy Information Service. “We are getting a rough idea of how these reactors would respond to, say, the New Madrid fault should it go off,” Kraft points out.

The Fukushima-2 reactors are all GE Mark-1 and Mark-2 containment designs. This is the same design employed at Dresden 2 & 3, and Quad Cities 1 & 2. They came on line in the 1970s, just after the Dresden and Quad Cities reactors came online. The accident scenarios playing out in Japan mirror problems and concerns that nuclear critics have been concerned about at U.S. reactors, including:

- **Concerns about reactor containment:** these reactor designs have been criticized before as being incapable of holding in radioactivity in the event of accidents with pressures and forces equivalent to those calculated at the Chernobyl-4 reactor accident site, whose 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary is this April. One of the current problems at Fukushima-2 Reactor 1 is in fact a build up in pressure, now reported to be twice normal. Efforts to vent radioactively contaminated gases to release the pressure have been thwarted ironically by lack of onsite electrical power;
- **Concerns about the “spent” fuel pools:** at Fukushima sites the spent fuel pools are outside of the reactor containment buildings. At Dresden and Quad Cities, they are not only outside the containments, they are positioned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the buildings, meaning that a pipe break on the lines feeding cooling water to the pools would result in the pools draining, the fuel overheating and ultimately melting and causing an uncontrollable fire. “This is not as inconceivable as it sounds,” notes Kraft. “These Illinois reactors could be seriously affected by the New Madrid fault, or by a serious airliner crash, since they are not in the most protected areas of the reactor site,” Kraft points out.
- **Consequences for electricity production:** Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has already stated that the earthquake will result in power shortages for a time, as reactors are repaired and inspected. “The same thing happened in Japan a mere 4 years ago, and 7 reactors were out of commission for over a year,” notes Kraft. “Nuclear power plants in seismically active areas are going to be extremely vulnerable to this kind of major disruption,” says Kraft. “That’s not even looking at possible future effects from tsunamis resulting from the earthquakes,” he continues. “Whatever has already happened must clearly be possible. Japan failed to learn this lesson in creating a rigid reliance on nuclear power. Nations in high-seismic areas will continue to be prone to both these kinds of disruptions in service, and also increased risks from major accidents and possible radiation releases. There IS a better way to get electrons,” Kraft notes.

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- **False sense of complacency and minimization of effects:** in the press statements from both the Japanese regulatory agency and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the standard public pronouncements about the public not being in danger have already been promulgated.

“This stands in contradiction to some of the news reported already, “ Kraft points out. “Japanese press accounts speak of the need to release radioactive gas with ‘the radioactive element in the vapor that...would not effect the environment or human health.’ Other reports present contradictory information about the operability of the radiation monitors, some accounts saying they are working, others that they are not. These statements are not consistent, not fully accurate.

“While the Japanese to their credit deserve praise for the decision to conduct an early evacuation of residents around the stricken reactor, anticipating the need to vent radioactive gases, they are in no position yet to make such glib comments about contents and effects of those releases,” according to Kraft.

- **Consequences for the Nuclear ‘Renaissance’:** “As nations watch the costly and disruptive effects of the second major shutdown of Japanese reactors in 4 years, they would be wise to learn the lessons that nuclear power is an inflexible, dangerous, costly and unnecessary energy resource moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” says Kraft. “Yet, even in the U.S. we have the President and Congressional nuclear allies prepared to squander tens-of-billions of dollars on loans and loan guarantees for new nuclear plants that already will provide power at rates higher than solar energy. Why?” Kraft asks.

“The nuclear ‘renaissance’ is more a relapse than anything else. It’s the nuclear industry willing to push the ratepayer’s and taxpayer’s faces a fraction of an inch away from the fan blades, using ratepayer money to bet that nothing will go wrong, with only their verbal assurances that ‘the public was never in any danger.’ The situation in Japan demonstrates WHY the public has a right to some healthy skepticism. The current situation in Japan begs the obvious question: Is this trip REALLY necessary, moving forward?” Kraft says.

NEIS will be monitoring the situation in Japan for the rest of the night and weekend, and will be posting periodic updates to its website at : [www.neis.org](http://www.neis.org)  
Feel free to contact us for clarifications and current information.

Due to current AT&T phone and internet problems, our normal office number is not in service. We can be reached at: (773)505-3550 (cell phone); and also by Skype at: davekhamburg