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## Daiichi crisis speeds Germany's nuclear phaseout

By Juergen Baetz

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BERLIN — Germany is determined to show the world how abandoning nuclear energy can be done.

The world's fourth-largest economy stands alone among leading industrialized nations in its decision to stop using nuclear energy because of its inherent risks. It is betting billions on expanding the use of renewable energy to meet power demands instead.

The transition was supposed to happen slowly over the next 25 years, but is now being accelerated in the wake of Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster, which Chancellor Angela Merkel has called a "catastrophe of apocalyptic dimensions."

Berlin's decision to take seven of its 17 reactors offline for three months for new safety checks has provided a glimpse into how Germany might wean itself from getting nearly a quarter of its power from atomic energy.

And specialists say Germany's phaseout provides a good map that countries such as the United States, which uses a similar amount of nuclear power, could follow. The German model would not work, however, in countries like France, which relies on nuclear energy for more than 70 percent of its power and has no intention of shifting.

"If we had the winds of Texas or the sun of California, the task here would be even easier," said Felix Matthes of Germany's renowned Institute for Applied Ecology. "Given the great potential in the US, it would be feasible there in the long run too."

The Italian government has put a one-year moratorium on plans to revive nuclear energy in a country that shut down its reactors more than two decades ago.

Premier Silvio Berlusconi's Cabinet approved the moratorium yesterday. Italy rejected nuclear power in a referendum the year after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, forcing the shutdown of its four working plants.

Nuclear power has been very unpopular in Germany ever since radioactivity from Chernobyl drifted across the country. A center-left government penned a plan a decade ago to abandon the technology for good by 2021, but Merkel's government last year amended it to extend the plants' lifetime by an average of 12 years. That extension was put on hold after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami compromised nuclear power plants in Japan, and is being reevaluated as the safety of all of Germany's nuclear reactors is being rechecked.

Germany currently gets 23 percent of its energy from nuclear power — about as much as the United States. Its ambitious plan to shut down its reactors will require at least \$210 billion in investment in alternative-energy sources, which analysts say will probably lead to higher electricity prices.

Germany now gets 17 percent of its electricity from renewable energies, 13 percent from natural gas, and more than 40 percent from coal. The Environment Ministry says that in 10 years, renewable energy will contribute 40 percent of the country's overall electricity production.

The government has been vague on a total price tag for the transition, but it said last year that approximately \$28 billion a year would be needed, acknowledging that \$107 billion alone would be required through 2030 for installing offshore wind farms.

The president of Germany's Renewable Energy Association, Dietmar Schuetz, said the government should create a more favorable regulatory environment to help in bringing forward some \$210 billion in investment in alternative-energy sources this decade by businesses and homeowners.

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