



Japan says no choice but to flood reactors

By North Asia correspondent [Mark Willacy](#), wires

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The Japanese government says it has no choice but to keep pouring water into reactors at the Fukushima nuclear plant to limit a huge meltdown, despite fears it could cause highly radioactive leaks.

Firefighters and soldiers have been hosing sea and fresh water into four of the six plant reactors since the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami on March 11 knocked out their cooling systems.

As a consequence of this emergency measure, since last week radioactive water has been found in the basements of all four of the reactors' turbine buildings and in underground tunnels linked to them.

Adding to concerns, plutonium has now been detected in soil at five spots around the plant.

But chief government spokesman Yukio Edano says his country has no choice but to keep pouring water into the reactors.

"We need to avoid the fuel rods from heating up and drying up. Continuing the cooling is unavoidable. We need to prioritise injecting water," he said.

Water found in the tunnel linked to the No. 2 reactor showed a radiation reading of more than 1,000 millisieverts per hour and contained water equivalent to more than two Olympic swimming pools.

"We are making utmost efforts to keep the fuel rods from heating up while using as little water as possible," Mr Edano said.

"But fundamentally we are faced with a situation where we need to remove the water as quickly as possible."

Workers began removing water in the No. 1 reactor's turbine building via a condenser on Tuesday.



Radioactive water has been found in the basements of all four reactors' turbine buildings at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. (TEPCO)

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But efforts to remove the leaked water in No. 2 and 3 reactors are being hampered by the fact that their condensers are near to brimming.

Officials in China, South Korea, the Philippines and the United States have recorded traces of radioactive material in the air but pose no health risks, officials say.

Meanwhile, Japan's national policy minister Koichiro Genba has raised the prospect of nationalising the operator of the Fukushima plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO).

The company, which has 45 million customers, looks likely to face a massive compensation bill for the disaster.

The Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper is reporting that by nationalising the company the government would bear responsibility for any liabilities stemming from the crisis while ensuring stable supplies of electricity.

However Mr Edano says the government is not considering nationalising TEPCO.

- ABC/AFP

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