



Global Security Newswire
by National Journal Group

Daily news on nuclear, biological and
chemical weapons, terrorism and
related issues.

New Earthquake Forces Workers From Japan Plant

Friday, April 8, 2011

A 7.4-magnitude earthquake on Thursday forced workers to pull back from recovery operations at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, holding up efforts to contain radioactivity at the severely damaged facility, Reuters reported (see [GSN](#), April 7; Chizu Nomiyama, [Reuters I](#), April 7).

Personnel returned to the plant after a tsunami alert expired, and they found no new problems or fluctuations in radiation levels. The six-reactor site was crippled by the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and devastating tsunami that hit Japan on March 11; the confirmed death toll from the events now exceeds 12,000 people (Chizu Nomiyama, [Reuters II](#), April 7).

Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency indicated the incident did not disrupt water transfers into the pressure vessels for the facility's No. 1, No. 2 or No 3 reactors, the International Atomic Energy Agency said. Authorities have been pumping water into the site for weeks in an effort to prevent nuclear materials from overheating and potentially releasing significant amounts of radioactive material into the environment (International Atomic Energy Agency release, April 8).

The aftershock also did not affect a transfer of nitrogen gas into the No. 1 reactor, a measure aimed at preventing new hydrogen detonations, Reuters reported (Nomiyama, [Reuters II](#)).

Elsewhere, though, the event caused fluid to spill from spent fuel cooling ponds for three reactors at the Onagawa nuclear power plant in Japan's Miyagi prefecture, site manager Tohoku Electric Power indicated on Friday. Coolant also escaped from three spots at that facility's No. 3 reactor.

The Onagawa facility, which has remained off-line since last month's earthquake, lost two of its three connections to outside electricity sources on Thursday, and power to the pools briefly switched off. An auxiliary power supply remained available.

"We detected a small rise in radiation levels inside the reactor buildings, and are trying to find the locations of the leaks," a company representative said. "We see no change in radiation levels outside the reactor buildings."

"The epicenter of the [Thursday] earthquake was 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Onagawa nuclear power plant and approximately 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini nuclear power plants," the U.N. nuclear watchdog indicated ([Reuters III](#), April 8).

Meanwhile, no indications have emerged that material at the Fukushima Daiichi plant has melted through reactor vessels or containers, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Obama administration officials as saying on Thursday. The finding suggests workers might succeed in minimizing additional radioactive material releases and additional harm to reactors at the site, according to the newspaper.

"We are a long way from a point where anybody would say this is stable," one high-level administration official said. "But it is not a runaway. For a long time, we will be at a declining level of risk."

Specialists noted a lack of strontium, technetium, and other substances around the facility that would be released if atomic materials there reached extremely high temperatures.

The primary radioactive threats from the plant -- iodine and cesium -- can escape in water. Radioactive materials might have escaped from ruptures in three site reactors, though the situation was still unclear, administration analysts said.

"We don't know how the containment failed," one analyst said. "It is more of a leak than a massive rupture. There is an extremely low probability of a melt-through of the reactor vessel. There is no conclusive evidence of a melt-through" (Ralph Vartabedian, *Los Angeles Times*, April 8).

The Japanese government was deciding whether to expand the exclusion zone now extending 12 miles from the plant, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano as saying on Thursday.

"Current evacuation orders apply to areas where people are in danger of having received 50 millisieverts (of cumulative exposure)," Edano said. "We are now looking into what to do with other areas where, with prolonged exposure, people may receive that amount."

Tokyo has not indicated when it could reach a decision (Sekiguchi/Obe, *Wall Street Journal*, April 8).

Specialists from a number of U.S. nuclear firms have joined experts with Toshiba, one manufacturer of equipment at the plant, to plan the decades-long process of dismantling site components, the *New York Times* reported. The effort would involve eliminating nuclear fuel, taking apart reactors, tearing down structures and removing contaminants from the surrounding area.

“Each of these problems is solvable and have been solved before,” said Toshiba America Nuclear Energy Senior Vice President Hiroshi Sakamoto, who heads the planning group (Ken Belson, *New York Times*, April 7).

In China, the Foreign Ministry formally informed Japan of its worries over the release of contaminated water from the plant into the Pacific Ocean this week, the Associated Press reported (Associated Press/*Washington Post*, April 8).

Radioactive material from the site would not contaminate Chinese materials drawn from the ocean, but Beijing should continue monitoring developments, *China Daily* quoted an official expert as saying (Jin Zhu, *China Daily*, April 8).