

One Year After Fukushima
Nuclear Energy in America and Florida

The first anniversary of the unprecedented earthquake combined with an extraordinary tsunami that devastated much of Japan last March 11 is sure to trigger a new round of attempts by anti-nuclear activists to exploit those events as part of their long-standing campaign to oppose nuclear energy here in America. Tactics typically include exaggeration, false claims and great departure from science. We should reject these tactics in favor of a more thoughtful, fact-based reaction.

As stated in the Report, *Learning Lessons of Fukushima*, conducted by the prestigious MIT Center for Advanced Nuclear Energy Systems, “[t]he initial response of the nuclear industry and the U.S. Government to the Fukushima accident has been measured and rational. However, the risk of over-reacting to an accident, particularly one as dramatic as Fukushima, remains high.”

But because Florida nuclear plants provide 15% of our electricity, it is reasonable to reflect on the Fukushima tragedy and examine lessons learned from an extraordinary event that left 4 of 6 reactors in the town of Daichi severely damaged. Those reactors shut down automatically, as designed, in response to the earthquake itself. But the subsequent tsunami reached heights that were beyond the design of the facility causing a loss of electricity supplying the cooling systems to the facility. While no member of the public was harmed by radiation, there were significant quantities of radiation released so the event prompted rational examination of nuclear power plants worldwide, with particular emphasis on locations near significant seismic activity.

The responsive actions by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and nuclear plant operators should be applauded. American nuclear power plants are the most tightly regulated industrial facilities on earth. America’s governmental oversight for safety and security of these plants is greater than any other nation due in large part to the NRC which is recognized world wide as the model for nuclear plant oversight. Comprised of hundreds of the world’s best experts, the NRC provided U.S. experts to assist Japan and promptly initiated a full scale inspection and review of all 104 American nuclear units, issuing conclusions that were distributed publicly.

After the initial review by the NRC Fukushima Near-Term Task Force (NTTF), they issued a statement that “... continued operation and continued licensing activities at nuclear power plants do not impose an imminent risk to the public health and safety...”

As Floridians, we should also note that there are few technical parallels between the Daichi

plants and ours. As has been widely reported, none of our nuclear plants here in Florida are of the design that experienced the damage in Fukushima. Compared with the Daichi plants, Florida's reactors are located in areas of low seismic activity, low tsunami probability and at elevations far above predictable sea level surge capability, even for Category 5 hurricanes.

There are parallels, however, in the need to ensure that our nuclear plant operators strive for continuous improvement. America's nuclear plant operators have implemented a credible plan to further enhance safety through three "Tiers" of actions based on the understanding of the Fukushima event. These actions were additional to the extensive upgrades made to Florida nuclear plants to further accommodate massive events following 9-11 including additional pumps, hoses, and cooling system upgrades that were not available to the plants in Fukushima. We should recognize them for this accomplishment but also maintain focus to ensure full implementation.

We should all reflect on the tragic natural disaster one year ago that destroyed every man-made structure in its path and took the lives of over 20,000. Our thoughts and prayers should again be extended to our friends in Japan. Although none of those fatalities related to nuclear plants, it is logical for that event to focus our attention on continuous safety improvement here in America.

Nuclear energy is a clean, safe, emission-free source of cost-effective energy. It provides 20 percent of America's electricity and 73 percent of America's carbon-free electricity. In Florida, nuclear power plants have provided the lowest cost component of our electricity supply portfolio for over three decades. We must maintain our commitment to these benefits.

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