

## Fukushima Vigil March 11, 2017

March 11 marks the start of the seventh year of the catastrophic meltdowns beginning in 2011. Mostly, this has occurred under the radar of the media. During the tsunami and in the immediate wake of the massive storm, we were in touch with the daily conditions at Fukushima. Now, although the reactors continue to poison the air and water, and although those in charge continue to flounder, Fukushima Daiichi is out of the news.

- This year, **TEPCO**, the Japanese company in charge, admitted it does not know what to do, and that in 2011 it **covered up** the fact that it knew the reactors were melting down.
- This year, Japan's Ministry of Finance projected that the decontamination of the Fukushima reactors will take 40 years and cost more than **\$70 billion – double previous estimates**.
- In February sophisticated and expensive **robotic technology failed**. The robot filmed Unit 2's fuel debris and found a hole below the reactor. That's not good. Inconceivably high levels of radiation inside the core of the damaged reactor melted the robot. If a human was to get that level of exposure (530sv/hr), death would occur in less than a minute. It is obvious human workers will never be able to get close enough to the reactors to work on them.
- Water continues to pour through the reactors, where it becomes irradiated by the melted fuel before moving into the Pacific Ocean. **300 tons of tritiated water is released into the Pacific daily**. TEPCO says the water is safe, and that it has been processed and is free of other radioactive elements, but the claim of no damage to the ocean is questioned by many scientists. They claim the "ice wall" is working and has cut groundwater flow by two-thirds; other say it has failed.
- While it is unclear whether the damage to **fish populations** off the Pacific coast of North America is from Fukushima radiation, there is no question that the Pacific fisheries are in trouble. As with so many negative effects of radioactive toxins, they are generational and do not arrive with red flags.
- About **80,000 refugees are still unable to return home** due to contamination.
- In March, the government will **stop housing subsidies** to 12,000 "voluntary evacuees." The majority are mothers who want to avoid risking their children's health by living apart from the fathers who work in Fukushima. The families will now pay for two homes.
- Last July the evacuation order was lifted for Minamisoma's 10,000 refugees; only 2,000 of those allowed to return did so.
- The government has ordered residents of Iitate, a rural town 20 miles northwest of the reactors, to return later this month. Extensive research by Greenpeace shows the level of radiation there is still unsafe, and in Iitate's forests it is comparable to the exclusion zone around Chernobyl. **Greenpeace says the government is trying to "normalize" radiation**.
- The very pro-nuclear conservative Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, managed to get the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to award the 2020 summer Olympics to Japan, by stating falsely that the Fukushima clean up was under control. Much of the games are slated to take place in the Tokyo area, but the baseball and softball competitions are supposed to take place in the prefecture (like a US state) of Fukushima. This is appalling, as the radiation levels at the reactors continue to spike, and there is no ability to have anything cleaned up by 2020. Former Prime Minister Koizumi, who has stated repeatedly his deep regret for promoting the nuclear program in Japan, has called Prime Minister Abe's assurances to the IOC a lie.
- Due to Abe's States Secrets law, press freedom is severely curtailed and facts about radiation, the reactors, the environment and public health are hard to find. In 2010 Japan was #11 in Reporters without Borders freedom of the press list; it is now #72. Japan is no longer listed as a Full Democracy on the Economists' Index of Democracy.

We are grateful that Vermont Yankee is closed, and that our region's chances of facing such tragedy - permanent displacement of thousands of citizens, fear of long term disease, destruction of habitat and farmland, and financial ruin - has decreased. For decades to come, Vermont will deal with the consequences of nuclear power, its radioactive waste and the risks that come with decommissioning.

The world cannot absorb another Fukushima-like disaster. We must stop this industry, and replace this power with the renewables that are safe, or at least far safer, cheaper, and will never, never poison an ocean or a country.