

RESPONSE TO NUCLEAR FALLOUT

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HISTORY

On March 11, 2011, a nuclear crisis ensued after a devastating 9.0 magnitude earthquake hit Japan and damaged four of the six nuclear reactor buildings in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, causing the failure of cooling systems that usually maintain the safety of the nuclear cores. This situation prompted the evacuation of tens of thousands of civilians living within a twenty km radius zone around the plant and radiation levels rose to alarming heights in the surrounding area. Radiation leaked into local food and water supplies. Throughout the crisis, there were various problems with the responses that attempted to address the issue, mainly including a lack of transparency from the Japanese government regarding the crisis. There was also heavy criticism directed at national and international organizations alike for lacking action and response to mitigate the crisis.

PAST ACTION

Among those criticized are the WHO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However the WHO is limited and underdeveloped in matters pertaining to responding to nuclear crises, one of the reasons being that the WHO is obligated to respect the sovereignty of the government. The following excerpt from the WHO's official site clarifies its role in Japan succinctly:

“What is WHO's role in nuclear emergencies?”

In accordance with its Constitution and the International Health Regulations, WHO is mandated to assess public health risks and provide technical consultation and assistance in association with public health events, including those associated with radiation events. In doing so, WHO is working with independent experts and other UN agencies.

WHO's work is supported by a global network comprising more than 40 specialized institutions in radiation emergency medicine. The network, the Radiation Emergency Medical Preparedness and Assistance Network (REMPAN), provides technical assistance for radiation emergency preparedness and response.”

Source: World Health Organization, 'FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns: WHO's Response'. <http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/faqs/en/index9.html>

As stated above, the Radiation Emergency Medical Preparedness and Assistance Network (REMPAN) has a more significant role in dealing with nuclear accidents since they deal with providing assistance to people over-exposed to radiation in an emergency medical and public health situation. Assistance may include:

- Human Resources Specialists: Specialists in radiation medicine, health physics, radiology, haematology and other appropriate specialities (e.g. of Burn departments), as well as skilled nurses and technicians.
- Equipment: most centres are well-equipped to provide special medical assistance to overexposed persons. They have portable equipment for radiation monitoring.
- Medical Services: Assistance is provided for the diagnosis, prognosis, medical treatment and medical follow-up of persons affected by radiation.
- Scientific Services: Expertise can be provided to assess radiation doses to exposed persons (most of the REMPAN institutions have bio-dosimetry laboratories).
- Transportation: Advise on the transportation of affected persons.
- Specialized Teams: WHO could organize multinational teams on rendering medical assistance on site.

Source: World Health Organization, 'WHO/REMPAN Collaborating Centres and Liaison Institutions'. http://www.who.int/ionizing_radiation/a_e/rempan/en/index3.html

In the case of Japan's nuclear incident, REMPAN's experts were placed on standby March 13, 2011 and did not travel into Japan until their assistance was requested by the Japanese authorities. This is another example of the limitations placed on REMPAN and WHO's ability to provide assistance. However, there were already a number of REMPAN institutions situated in Japan and so the country had access to nuclear expertise.

Japan

Being the focus of recent events, Japan's nuclear incident will be the topic of debate during these committee sessions. The Japanese government has been facing strong criticism for neglecting their people and hiding the details of the incident from the general public in favor of maintaining nuclear power plants to produce energy as nuclear plants produced 30% of Japan's electricity before the Fukushima crisis.

POTENTIAL CHANGES TO WHO POLICIES

Any changes to WHO standard operation procedures in response to nuclear fallout should balance issues such as national sovereignty, public safety, and economic considerations. Delegates should also consider the safety of UN health care workers. Questions regarding access to the following documents below may be addressed to Forson Chan (DSG of Advanced Committees for ConnectMUN2011) at committees1@connectmun.ca.

Current WHO approved policy outlines in the event of a nuclear emergency can be found here:

http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/EPR-MEDICAL-2005_web.pdf

This is a very important document that must be read prior to the start of the conference. Any resolutions should build upon procedures outlined in this publication.

Food, agricultural, and related economic following can be found in the following document published by the Congressional Research Service Reports for the People, based in the United States:

<http://openocrs.com/document/R41766/2011-04-13/download/1005/>

Short and long term health concerns may be found in this article published by the Journal of Nuclear Medicine:

<http://jnm.snmjournals.org/content/52/9/1423.full.pdf+html>

Frequent asked questions by the public have been addressed by the WHO. Please note that questions are answered over multiple pages.

<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/faqs/en/index.html>

Links to other useful scientific sources can be found here:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3115643/>

These documents are intended to delegates to determine the important inherent risks following a nuclear disaster, and provide suggestions on what efforts can be made to current nuclear facilities and crisis management infrastructure to mitigate future harm.

OTHER SOURCES:

WHO/REMPAN Collaborating Centres and Liaison Institutions

http://www.who.int/ionizing_radiation/a_e/rempan/en/index3.html

FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns: Current Risk

<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/faqs/en/index.html>

FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns: WHO's Response

<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/faqs/en/index9.html>

In Graphics: Fukushima Nuclear Alert

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12726591>

Q&A: Health effects of radiation exposure

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-12722435>

Japan nuclear alert at Fukushima - Q&A

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12732015>

Japan earthquake: timeline of the disaster, from tsunami to nuclear crisis

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/8382734/Japan-earthquake-timeline-of-the-disaster-from-tsunami-to-nuclear-crisis.html>

Japan Nuclear Crisis: Fukushima Alert Eased
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14463055>

Japan earthquake: WHO puts global radiation experts on standby
http://www.wpro.who.int/media_centre/jpn_earthquake/news/pr_20110313.htm

Japan Earthquake and Tsunami
http://www.wpro.who.int/sites/eha/disasters/2011/jpn_earthquake/list.htm

