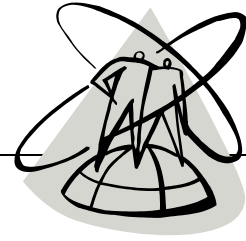


The Chernobyl Nuclear Accident



On April 26, 1986 at 1:23 am, technicians at the Chernobyl Power Plant in the Ukraine (former Soviet Union) allowed the power in the fourth reactor to fall to low levels as part of a controlled experiment which went wrong. The reactor overheated causing a meltdown of the core. Two explosions blew the top off the reactor building releasing clouds of deadly radioactive material in the atmosphere for over 10 days. The people of Chernobyl were exposed to radioactivity 100 - 300 times greater than the Hiroshima bomb.

According to an April 2006 report by the German affiliate of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear Warfare, entitled "Health Effects of Chernobyl", more than 10,000 people are today affected by thyroid cancer and 50,000 cases are expected. The report projected tens of thousands dead among the liquidators. In Europe, it alleges that 10,000 deformities have been observed in newborns because of Chernobyl's radioactive discharge, with 5000 deaths among newborn children. They also claimed that several hundreds of thousands of the people who worked on the site after the accident are now sick because of radiation, and tens of thousands are dead.

The radioactive cloud immediately spread across a massive area of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Within a week, radioactive material was detected in large areas of Europe and Asia, as well as smaller amounts in northern Canada and Algeria in northern Africa. Most of the radioactive material is still contained in the hastily built sarcophagus. Plans are to build a "new safe confinement" structure over the entire reactor.

The Chernobyl Plant is made up of 4 graphite reactors (and 2 additional reactors were under construction at the time of the accident). Number 4 exploded in 1986, Number 2 was shut down from a fire in 1991. Number 1 was decommissioned in November 1996 as part of a deal between the Ukrainian government and international organizations to end operations at the plant. On December 15th, 2000, Number 3 was shut down, which transformed the Chernobyl plant from energy producer to energy consumer.