

Radiation Safety Counseling News

Japan Nuclear Fears

Dear Reader,

This month the world is focused on the crisis in Japan. As the situation at the nuclear facility continues to evolve, I have been asked to provide briefings to various organizations.

In this issue, we share with you the synopsis of that briefing and links to accurate and up-to-date information available via the Internet. You can view/print/save a copy of our briefing packet from our website ([click here](#)).

Please contact us with any questions that you may have. You can send questions via email or contact us on Facebook or our Forum (Blog).

Regards,
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Radiation Safety Counseling Services



Ray Johnson

Japan Nuclear Fears - the Psychology of Radiation Safety

The earthquake and tsunami in Japan, with subsequent damage to several nuclear plants, have given the media a new source of alarming news about dangers of radiation. The media and antinuclear advocates now have a great opportunity to speculate about deadly radiation not only in Japan but wherever nuclear plants are located. The evolving drama of the nuclear plants lends itself to daily news events while the earthquake and tsunami are now old news. This is interesting because thousands have died from natural forces and no one has died as a result of radiation. Based on what we know of radiation effects, it is likely that either none or very few deaths will be traced directly to the Japan nuclear incidents. And yet, fears of radiation are rampant, not only in Japan but in other countries including the US.

Fears of radiation have made the profession of radiation safety what it is today. Where would the profession of radiation safety be if people were not afraid of radiation? The primary motivation for developments in technology and regulations for radiation safety has been fears of radiation. Fears are the basis of antinuclear sentiments and aversion to nuclear power, nuclear wastes, and especially nuclear bombs. Fears of radiation have moved the profession of radiation safety to very conservative practices in the name of radiation safety. And yet, psychologists know that fear is a good thing as a natural response of our brains for our protection. We have survived as a species by knowing when to be afraid and when to react

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Got Questions?

If you have a question about radiation safety that you would like to share, please post your question on our Forum (blog) or our Facebook page. Each week our experts will select a question and post an answer that will also be included in our monthly newsletter.

To post a question go to:
[Radiation Safety Forum](#)
or
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for safety. Psychologists define fear as an emotional response to a specific stimulus, such as pain or immediate threat of danger. Since radiation does not produce any sensation in our bodies, then our fears of radiation have to be based on imagination. Thus, fear of radiation is not a true fear based on something happening right now, but a manufactured fear based in images of terrible consequences. Our imaginations drive worries and anxieties.

The primary delivery vehicle for radiation fears is the news media. As the wealthiest nation in the world, the US also has the luxury of being afraid of virtually everything. Although, it's hard not to worry when fear is sprayed at us like tear gas from our TV 24/7. The media thrives on telling us of calamities and dangers everywhere in the world, and seems to especially like stories of "deadly radiation." In fact those words have been used to portray radiation for so long (at least 60 years) that now subconsciously people automatically react to the word "radiation" with aversion. Unfortunately, much of what the media reports is based on radiation mythology (common beliefs which are not technically true). For example, most public concerns are fueled by misconceptions of the Linear Non- threshold dose model.

Regulators are also driven by fears (what if they are not seen as responsive to scared constituents, what if they do not provide for adequate safety regulations, what if people are harmed from their negligence, etc.?). Radiation safety professionals may be driven by fears as well, such as fear of criticism for not doing their jobs well, irresponsibility, carelessness, or neglect. Thus the profession of radiation safety is built around fears. Even the words which describe our work "radiation safety" imply that there is something to be afraid of, something to be avoided, something for which caution is needed, or something which threatens us.

Japan Nuclear Plant News

Following are links to reliable, accurate, and up-to-date sources of information regarding the Japan reactor problems.

- Health Physics Society - current news (<http://hps.org/newsandevents/societynews.html>)
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission (<http://www.nrc.gov/>),
- International Atomic Energy Agency (<http://www.iaea.org/>),
- World Health Organization (<http://www.who.int/en/>),
- American Nuclear Society (<http://www.new.ans.org/>),
- International Radiation Protection Association (<http://www.irpa.net/>),
- National Academy of Sciences (<http://www.nationalacademies.org/>),
- Nuclear Energy Agency (<http://www.oecd-nea.org/>) and
- Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/>)

Communication Insights

Each week, we post another installment of guidance to improve communication with others. To stay informed, you can go to our [blog](#) and click on Follow: RSS, then choose to "Subscribe to this Feed".

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We hope you find this information helpful and welcome your comments, questions, or other feedback.

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