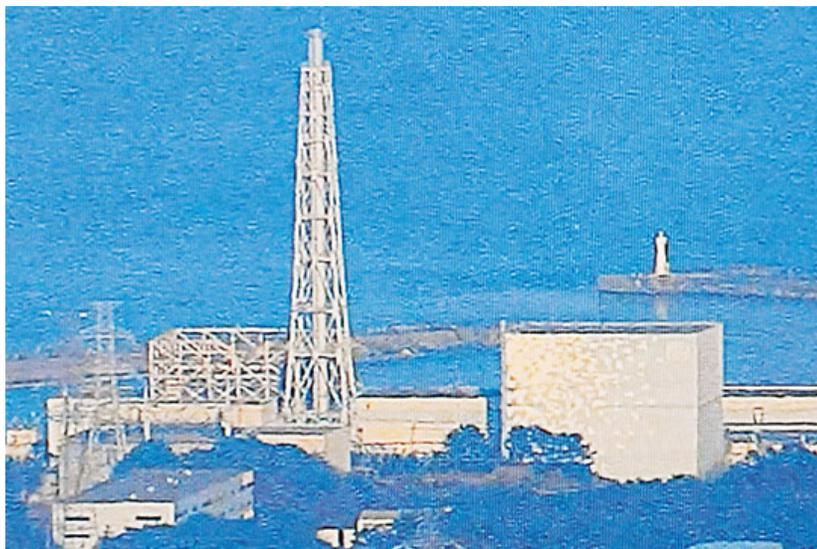


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Sunday, March 13, 2011



Only the skeletal frame remains of the boxlike housing of the No. 1 reactor at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear station after an explosion. KYODO PHOTO

## Fukushima reactor cover blows up

### Four hurt; radiation spews amid frantic effort to prevent meltdown

Compiled from Kyodo, AP

SENDAI — An explosion at a nuclear power station blew up the building housing a reactor Saturday, injuring four workers, as officials scrambled to prevent a meltdown.

The blast followed the failure of the power plant's cooling system, which was compromised by Friday's 8.8-magnitude temblor.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that runs the Fukushima No. 1 plant, said the four workers injured in the blast — two of its own staff and two from another company, do not have life-threatening injuries and all remained conscious.

At the time of the 3:36 p.m. blast, the four were tending to problems caused by the massive quake, which devastated northeastern Japan and generated giant tsunami.

The explosion about 250 km northeast of Tokyo destroyed the walls and roof of the aging facility, which housed the reactor, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano told reporters at a hastily convened news conference Saturday evening.

TV footage showed that the power plant's roof and walls had disappeared. Tepco said the roof of the building collapsed after a large tremor.

Edano urged local residents to stay calm and said radiation levels were being carefully monitored. He also urged all residents living within 20 km of its Fukushima No. 1 and 10 km of No. 2. plants to evacuate.

"We are now trying to analyze what is behind the explosion," Edano said. "We ask everyone to take action to secure safety."



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### Scared or prepared?

The government [upped its casualty estimate for a killer quake-tsunami combo](#) by more than a factor of 10. What's your take?

- Forewarned is forearmed. This information will save lives.**
- All this does is scare people. It's not helpful.**
- It's inspired me to think more seriously about possible evacuation routes.**
- Numbers like these aren't much more than a guess.**

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The nuclear power plant lost cooling ability after being jolted by Friday's devastating quake, and radioactive cesium and iodine were detected nearby Saturday.

Detection of the materials, which are created in the atomic fission process, prompted the nuclear safety agency to admit the reactor has been melting, a first for Japan.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, hourly radiation emissions from the Fukushima plant reached 1,015 microsieverts on the premises — an amount equivalent to the dose an ordinary person would receive in one year.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency said serious damage to the stricken reactor's containment facility was unlikely despite the explosion.

Edano also said radiation levels have been decreasing and the reactor containment vessel wasn't damaged in the blast.

Wind in the region is weak and was headed in a northeasterly direction — toward the sea — for the time being, the Meteorological Agency said.

The company scrambled earlier Saturday to release pressure in the containers housing the reactors to prevent a nuclear meltdown from occurring, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency said.

Even before Tepco succeeded in reducing the pressure, which involved releasing steam that would likely include radioactive materials, radiation had risen to an unusually high level in and near the No. 1 nuclear plant.

Work to depressurize the containers, aimed at preventing the plants from sustaining damage and losing their critical containment function, was conducted under an unprecedented government order.

At the No. 1 plant, the amount of radiation reached around 1,000 times normal inside the control room of the reactor, and 70 times normal near its main gate.

It was the first time an external radioactive leak had been confirmed since the disaster.

Earlier reports said the U.S. Air Force was helping to deliver coolant to the damaged plant, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was believed to have confirmed Friday in the U.S.

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