

NEWS FROM BEYOND NUCLEAR

For Immediate Release: March 25, 2011

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Dense populations and risk of plutonium releases could mean Fukushima accident worse than Chernobyl, prominent Russian scientist says

TAKOMA PARK, MD – Dr. Alexey Yablokov, co-author of “*Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*,” and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, warned today that the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan could be comparable to or potentially greater than the health and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl reactor explosion on April 26, 1986 in Ukraine.

Speaking at a press conference in Washington, DC, Dr. Yablokov said: “We are seeing something that has never happened – a multiple reactor catastrophe including one using plutonium fuel as well as spent fuel pool accidents, all happening within 200 kilometers of a metropolis of 30 million people. Because the area is far more densely populated than around Chernobyl, the human toll could eventually be far worse in Japan.”

Dr. Yablokov’s book calculated that as many as one million people had likely died as a result of the Chernobyl accident, figures far higher than other “official” reports. He said the book had been met “mostly with silence” from bodies like the World Health Organization who have “avoided discussion” about the findings.

Dr. Yablokov was joined at the press conference by Erich Pica, president of Friends of the Earth and Cindy Folkers, radiation and health specialist at Beyond Nuclear.

“I am not optimistic about the situation at Fukushima,” Dr. Yablolov said. “It’s especially dangerous if plutonium is released as inhalation of plutonium results in a high probability of cancer. A release of plutonium will contaminate that area forever and it is impossible to clean up.” Plutonium is deadly for 240,000 years. Fears persist today that Unit 3 at Fukushima-Daiichi, which uses mixed plutonium, or MOX, fuel may have had a breach of containment after three workers there were contaminated at levels 10,000 times normal.

“The public in Japan and internationally are not getting the data they need to make a well-educated decision and to get the right advice,” said Pica. “That is why Friends of the Earth and other organizations have filed a Freedom of Information Act Request to U.S. agencies asking that they release the monitoring data they are getting from their staff in the U.S. and in Japan.”

The speakers pointed out that inhalation and ingestion of even low levels of radiation today could have long-term effects, manifesting illnesses even decades later.

“At Fukushima, our concern is not just the immediate exposures, but exposures that occur over the long term, from radioactive particles that are inhaled or ingested,” said Folkers. “These particles can fall on soil and in water and end up in the food supply for many years. We are worried that officials are measuring only the radiation that is the easiest to detect – gamma rays. Testing people for radiation on their skin or clothing is necessary, but it tells us little or nothing about what they could have breathed in or eaten—which results in internal exposure and long-term risk.”

Dr. Yablokov cautioned against the downplaying of the seriousness of the radiation releases at Fukushima. “When you hear ‘no immediate danger’ then you should run away as far and as fast as you can,” he said. He pointed out that the area around Chernobyl is as contaminated today as it was almost 25 years ago when the accident occurred. Cesium, americium, strontium and plutonium that deposited in soil have reached the roots of plants which then propel the radioactivity back to the surface. “The contamination there last year is the same as 20 years ago,” he said.

Coverage of the press conference can be viewed on C-Span at: <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/Chernob>

-30-

Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic. The Beyond Nuclear team works with diverse partners and allies to provide the public, government officials, and the media with the critical information necessary to move humanity toward a world beyond nuclear.

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