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Panel Says Crisis Showed Facilities' Terrorism Risks

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By YUKA HAYASHI

TOKYO—The Fukushima nuclear accident exposed the vulnerability of Japan's nuclear plants to potential terrorist attacks, years after the U.S. and other nations beefed up protection of their facilities, according to a report released Tuesday by a private independent panel that investigated the accident.

The 400-page paper also includes never-reported details about response efforts, including how botched efforts to evacuate patients from area hospitals led to a number of deaths, and the story of a young woman who stayed put to assist nuclear-plant workers as the crisis, and danger, escalated. The Wall Street Journal reported on an advance copy of the panel's paper received ahead of a Tuesday news conference.



Enlarge Image

Zuma Press

Plant operator Tepco show s crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear-power plant.

The March crisis, in addition to showing the susceptibility of Japanese reactors to accidents, revealed the plant operator's lax implementation of security rules, such as closely monitoring the identities of workers entering the facility at all times, according to the findings.

"The weaknesses and defects with the electrical and cooling systems were exposed," said Tetsuya Endo, a member of the panel and a former chairman of the board of governors at the International

Atomic Energy Agency. "For terrorists, these are among the easiest targets."

Related Video

Recovery workers at Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant still fear for the future, one year after the country's worst ever nuclear accident. (Video: Reuters/Photo: AP)

Highlighting the lax security procedures at Fukushima Daiichi after an earthquake and tsunami set off a nuclear accident on March 11, the panel learned that at one point, the security personnel responsible for checking people entering the plant had themselves evacuated, leaving their posts unmanned.

Three months later, officials noticed that 69 nuclear workers who were supposed to be on the premises during the initial days of the accident were unaccounted

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for, setting off a frantic search. Many of them were later confirmed safe, but the whereabouts of 10 of the people are still unknown.

A spokesman for Japan Atomic Energy Commission, a government entity responsible for nuclear security policy, had no comment on the report's findings, saying its officials hadn't a chance to review the report. A spokeswoman for [Tokyo Electric Power Co.](#), [9501.TO -3.61%](#) the plant's operator, also had no comment, citing the same reason. Likewise, Osamu Fujimura, chief government spokesman, said at the afternoon news conference that the government hadn't received the panel's report so he wasn't able to comment on its contents.

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Water Central to Control of Nuclear Plant

Lax nuclear security was among the findings of the panel, organized by a privately funded group called the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, which was led by Yoichi Funabashi, a prominent journalist and former editor-in-chief of the Asahi Shimbun, a daily. The panel, comprised of about 30 scientists, lawyers and journalists, interviewed more than 300 people involved with the crisis response, including top government officials and nuclear-plant workers.

The report underscores how unprepared Japanese industry officials and regulators were for a major nuclear disaster. It carries, for example, an account of the evacuation of patients from the area's hospitals, introducing new details to what has been revealed about delays in evacuating people to safety during the chaotic hours after the accident.

Evacuating patients from hospitals posed major challenges for medical personnel and government officials, including the difficulty of finding transportation and providing care after power supplies and phone lines were cut off. A number of deaths apparently were caused by the delays in evacuation, the committee concluded.

Delays were particularly acute at one hospital in Okuma Township located just three miles from the plant. Of its 435 patients at the time of the accident, including 337 in its psychiatric ward, a total of 50 had died by the end of March, including 25 who died during the transit for evacuation or at emergency shelters. The problems were attributed to trouble locating vehicles to evacuate the patients, which prompted the hospital president to drive around the area and beg every emergency and military personnel he encountered to send help to his hospital.

"Ensuring the safety of the people is the government's foremost responsibility," said Koichi Kitazawa, chairman of the independent panel and former president of Japan Science and Technology Agency. "We can't say the government fulfilled its role of providing a system to ensure people's safety."

In another section of the report, testimony from plant workers depict the panic and tension at the emergency control room of Fukushima Daiichi during the first day of the accident. After receiving reports that steam was coming out of one of the reactors in the evening of March 11, one worker recalled that a fellow employee uttered: "This plant is dead. Our company is done for."

As Tokyo Electric prepared to vent the No.1 reactor to release pressure building up inside, Masao Yoshida, then the plant manager of Fukushima Daiichi, was heard shouting into the phone: "Just bring us some liquid. Whatever it is!"

After an attempt to open the vent valve electronically failed, workers were asked to go inside in groups in a relay fashion to do it manually. One worker said he witnessed five groups of workers, each made up of 20 Tepco employees, lined up in preparation for the effort.

"I will never forget the expression on the faces of those Tepco employees," the unnamed worker is quoted as saying. "Faced with the risk of death, they were pale and scared beyond words. They were all shaking."

One woman in her 20s was putting tape on their protective suits to make them airtight. It was learned later she was among the two female workers who had volunteered to stay at the plant and received radiation beyond the limit set by the government for female workers, according to the witness.



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