



Chernobyl - 25 years later - what have we learned?



Current rating: **4.7**

CHERNOBYL, Ukraine – 26 April, 2011 – On 26 April, 1986 a massive chemical explosion, estimated to be more than 100 times powerful than the atomic weapons used in World War II, released more than 500 dangerous radionuclides into the atmosphere. **See:** [our photo essay on Chernobyl in Ukraine](#) **Watch:** [video](#) of UN Secretary-General in Ukraine, honouring those who helped to "save

the world" in the aftermath of the accident **Watch:** UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova's [video message of hope](#) on Chernobyl anniversary

As a result of the accident, more than 200,000 square kilometres in Europe were exposed to high levels of Caesium-37 radioactive contamination. Over 70 percent of this area was in **Belarus, Russia and Ukraine**.

According to official reports, **thirty-one people died** during the first year after the accident and **600,000 people involved in fire fighting and clean-up operations were exposed to the high doses of radiation**.

Based on official reports, near **8,400,000 people in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia were exposed to radiation**. About 155,000 square kilometres in the three countries were contaminated.

Agricultural areas covering nearly 52,000 square kilometres were contaminated with cesium-137 and strontium-90, with 30-year and 28-year half-lives respectively.

Approximately 220,000 people were resettled but **millions continued to live in an environment where continued residual exposure created a range of adverse effects**. >> [Learn more about the history of Chernobyl](#)

It was, without a doubt, the worst nuclear power plant accident in history, classified at **level seven** on the [International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale](#).

As of 2011, the former "exclusion zone" is now [open for tourists](#), albeit for limited periods of time.

Today, most of the Chernobyl-affected areas are safe for living, but investors are wary of anything associated with the disaster.

As a result, affected areas suffer from high unemployment and poverty, while residents suffer from victim syndrome, a dependency culture, a high level of mistrust of experts and authorities and lack the information they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

While significant progress has been achieved in giving these communities the lives they had before the Chernobyl disaster, there is still work to be done to realize full social and economic recovery, and the restoration of livelihoods," said [UNDP Administrator Helen Clark](#) during [her visit to Chernobyl in December 2010](#).

"We stand in solidarity with those affected by the tragedy," says Ms. Sharapova, whose family was displaced from Gomel, one of the affected areas in Belarus, in the wake of the 1986 disaster.

"Today, while the anniversary is filled with sadness, we also acknowledge that this is a time for hope, as we move forward in building a better future for all those whose lives have been changed by this tragedy."

Sharapova has been a [Goodwill Ambassador](#) for UNDP since 2007.

>> [Tennis star Maria Sharapova gives \\$250,000 for UNDP Chernobyl projects](#)

UNDP support to communities affected by the Chernobyl accident

In 2004, [United Nations support to Chernobyl](#) shifted from humanitarian assistance to development aid, with UNDP assuming a coordination role of Chernobyl issues.



See photo essay of Chernobyl in Ukraine

UNDP in [Belarus](#), [Ukraine](#), and the [Russian Federation](#) works with Chernobyl affected communities on issues related to:

- economic development and investment that will promote growth and new jobs;
- education;
- reproductive health;
- the environment;
- community development; and
- promoting healthy lifestyles.

UNDP places particular significance on communicating objective, scientifically sound information about the effects of Chernobyl.

A new [Information and Computer Technology \(ICT\) centre](#) was just opened in [Druzhnya village](#) in Ukraine to help local

residents access practical information on how to deal with health risks and maintain healthy lifestyles in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident.

The centre was established as part of the [International Chernobyl Research and Information Network](#), a United Nations initiative which establishes internet information centres in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

Detailed information on radiological safety for people living in Chernobyl-affected areas is available on [chernobyl.info](#).

Chernobyl, Japan and the future

Ukraine hosted several international events this April, including the Summit on the Safe and Innovative use of Nuclear Energy, and a conference, [Chernobyl, 25 Years On: Safety for the Future](#).

"It was one thing to hear and to read about the Chernobyl disaster. It is another totally different experience to see it," said [United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) on 20 April when he visited the site of the [Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant](#).

The recent [power plant accident in Japan](#), like the Chernobyl disaster 25 years ago, calls for "deep reflection" on the future of nuclear energy, [said Mr. Ban](#), as he outlined a five-step plan to enhance nuclear safety at the Summit on the Safe and Innovative Use of Nuclear Energy.

"As we are painfully learning once again, nuclear accidents respect no borders," he said.

Mr. Ban said that both the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine in 1986 and the accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant last month raise popular fears and disturbing questions, while offering lessons for the global community.

"This is a moment for deep reflection: How do we ensure both the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and maximum safety? We need a global rethink on this fundamental question," he said.

"The population of Ukraine has unique experience in dealing with the consequences of global catastrophe," said [Elena Panova](#), Deputy Country Director of [UNDP in Ukraine](#).

"We empathize with the tragedy that the Japanese people are going through," said [Victoria Naumenko](#), a resident of Druzhnya. "We have experienced this and we know what people in Japan feel."



United Nations Secretary-General in Ukraine to mark the 25th anniversary of Chernobyl

"The Ukrainian people, perhaps like no other, understand deeply the tragic events in Japan and realizes the complexity of tasks facing the Japanese people after the earthquake, tsunami, and resulting nuclear accident," said [President Viktor Yanukovich](#) at the Kyiv Summit on Safe and Innovative Use of Nuclear Energy.

"Chernobyl and Fukushima showed that nuclear accident management requires mobilization of scientific, technical and resource potential of the entire international community."

Reader comments

I read this article.It depicts about the victims of the Nuclear affected people.I get emotional after reading about the effects caused to those people.

Nishant Sinha | 27 April 2011 7:33 AM

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