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# Chernobyl nuclear plant loses power in Ukraine. Can the radiation still be contained?

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Thirty years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the area, deemed uninhabitable for the next 3000 years, continues to house plant workers and provides a brief glimpse of the chaos left behind for curious tourists. BY ALI RIZVI

The power supply to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant has been cut off, Ukraine officials said on March 9. x

Minister of Energy of Ukraine German Galushchenko said there was a “potential threat to the power outage for the stability and security of the [Chernobyl nuclear power plant](#)” – which is now fully controlled by Russian troops, according to a news release from the Ukraine government.

“As of today, as a result of shelling by the occupying forces, the power supply to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant has been cut off,” Galushchenko said on March 9, “which could lead to equipment failures and lead to irreversible consequences.”

While the loss of power is a serious matter, American Nuclear Society President Steven Nesbit told McClatchy News there is no imminent threat to the public.

While the Russian army did stir up some radioactive contamination present in the area when they first reached the plant, radiation readings have since returned to normal, he said.

“Based on the information that we have, there is no imminent threat of large releases of radioactivity,” Nesbit said.

The reason for that, he explained, is that the radioactive material is in a stable situation.

The spent fuel has been removed from the reactors and is maintained either in cooling ponds or dry storage. According to Nesbit, the fuel hasn’t operated in decades and is at a temperature low enough that it couldn’t melt down – even after a long period of time with nobody there to run the cooling systems.

“The material there cannot explode on its own,” Nesbit said. “It’s in a stable configuration and it will remain safe, even if power is out for an extended period of time.”

However, Nesbit added that the power outage was “not a desirable scenario,” and that it is “important that they restore power to the site immediately.” v

The Ukrainian minister called on the European Commission for support to “stabilize the situation, withdraw Russian troops from Ukrainian nuclear power facilities and ensure the safety of nuclear power plants.”

## **WHAT’S HAPPENING AT THE PLANT AFTER RUSSIAN TROOPS TOOK OVER?**

About 210 technical personnel and guards have been working at the nuclear power plant nonstop since Russian forces took control on Feb. 24, Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) said in a news release.

Ukraine authorities said it was “becoming increasingly urgent and important for the safe management” of the plant that the personnel be rotated.

On March 9, the State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine said that the “regulatory control over the state of [nuclear and radiation safety](#)” at Chernobyl and in the Exclusion Zone was “currently impossible to exercise.”

Routine activities at Chernobyl, including maintenance and repair of the systems and equipment, that are typically performed daily have not been done since Feb. 24, the agency said.

The nuclear regulator said Russian occupants continue to “grossly violate the radiation safety and strict access control requirements” both at the nuclear plant and in the surrounding “Exclusion Zone.”

“I’m deeply concerned about the difficult and stressful situation facing staff at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the potential risks this entails for nuclear safety,” Grossi said on March 8. “I call on the forces in effective control of the site to urgently facilitate the safe rotation of personnel there.”

The handling of nuclear material has been put on hold, the release states. The plant includes decommissioned reactors as well as radioactive waste facilities. As of March 8, Grossi said that the remote data transmission from safeguards monitoring systems at Chernobyl has been lost but the latest data showed radiation levels were normal.

“We call on our international partners to urgently help protect Ukraine’s nuclear power plants. First of all, we are talking about closing the sky,”

Galushchenko said, referring to Ukraine’s plea for NATO and the Biden administration to [establish a no-fly zone](#) in Ukraine skies.

The Biden administration has maintained a reluctance to establish such a zone, reasoning that sending U.S. military to shoot down Russian planes could prompt “a potential direct war with Russia” — “the exact step that we want to avoid,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on March 3.

Galushchenko said the Ukraine government hopes that “the facts of nuclear terrorism, such as shelling from nuclear reactor tanks, will motivate our partners to make this decision.”

On April 25, 1986, a poorly designed experiment led to an [uncontrolled chain reaction](#) in the nuclear power plant’s No. 4 reactor, McClatchy News previously reported.

An ensuing fire and series of explosions breached containment of the reactor, allowing radiation and radioactive fallout to spread across Ukraine and Europe.

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