



Ukrainians block Russian troops from nuclear plant in Enerhodar - video

## Ukraine

# Russian forces surround Ukraine's biggest nuclear plant, sparking UN concerns

**Nuclear watchdog chief pleads with invading troops to allow workers to carry on 'providing safety and monitoring radiation' at Zaporizhzhia**

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**Julian Borger in Washington**

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The UN nuclear watchdog has voiced concern after Russian forces claimed to have surrounded Ukraine's biggest atomic plant, and called for its workers to be left alone to do their jobs.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said the Russian government had informed the agency that its troops had taken control of the area around the Zaporizhzhia plant in south-eastern Ukraine, the second biggest in Europe, housing six of the country's 15 reactors.

In their [letter to the IAEA](#), Russian officials insisted that Ukrainian staff at the plant were continuing to "work on providing nuclear safety and monitoring radiation in normal mode of operation".

However, the Ukrainian state enterprise running the country's nuclear industry, Energoatom, accused the Russian military of "openly terrorizing

employees of the station and residents of its satellite city Energodar”.

Video footage shared on social media by a Ukrainian official showed crowds of Ukrainians forming a barrier between the Russian forces and the nuclear plant, blocking their advance.

The interior ministry official, Anton Gerashchenko, said in a [Facebook post](#): “Russian generals - change your minds! Do not create conditions for the new Chernobyl! Radiation knows no nationalities, one does not spare anyone! Go around the Energodar and Zaporizhzhya.”

Ukraine has asked the IAEA to declare a [30km safe zone](#) around Ukraine's four nuclear power plants.

Grossi told the IAEA board of governors meeting in Vienna: “It is of critical importance that the armed conflict and activities on the ground around Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and any other of Ukraine's nuclear facilities in no way interrupts or endangers the facilities or the people working at and around them.”

The IAEA also said that a feed of radiation data from Zaporizhzhia had been interrupted on Tuesday and that Ukraine's nuclear regulatory inspectorate (SNRIU) was trying to find out the reason for the break and to restore the flow of data.

Grossi also raised concern over a report from the SNRIU that since Russians took over the Chernobyl plant, site of the 1986 disaster in north western Ukraine near the Belarus border, the staff there had not been permitted to go home.

The US deputy envoy to the IAEA, Louis Bono, said: “The Ukrainian staff at the site have not been allowed to leave and have been forced to work multiple shifts. This added stress on staff performing critical tasks further jeopardizes the safety and security of the site and the public.”

In his remarks Grossi said: “It is of utmost importance that the staff working at [the Chernobyl plant] are able to do their job safely and effectively, and that their personal wellbeing is guaranteed by those who have taken control,”

The remains of the reactor core which exploded in 1986 is buried under concrete at the site, and there are also spent fuel storage facilities and a large amount of radioactive dust in the topsoil of the surrounding area.

The churning up of the soil by Russian military vehicles caused limited radiation spikes. In a statement, Energoatom said: “Being in the exclusion zone now and

apparently not having the skills to ensure personal safety when working in radioactively contaminated areas, the invaders are exposed to significant external and internal radiation, which will undoubtedly manifest itself in the form of cancer.”

On Sunday, the Ukrainian authorities said Russian missiles had struck the site of a radioactive waste disposal facility in Kyiv. The day before, an electrical transformer in another waste facility in Kharkiv was damaged. In both cases there was no radioactive release, but the incidents highlighted the potential threat of ecological disaster from a war underway in a country with an extensive nuclear industry.

The American Nuclear Society (ANS), an association of industry professionals, is seeking to send material support to Ukraine to help nuclear workers there.

“The staff at Ukraine’s nuclear power plants must be able to fulfill their duties without interruption undue pressure or the fear of being killed or injured,” the ANS said in a statement. “Ukraine’s nuclear workers need their rest between shifts, access to their homes and a peace of mind that their loved ones are safe.

The society’s president, Steven Nesbit, said he hoped that the Russian invaders were aware of the dangers of a nuclear accident.

“All I can say is it’s hard to believe that they wouldn’t have a sensitivity to the issues here,” Nesbit said. “Russia and Vladimir Putin need to be taking all steps they can to avoid becoming even more of a pariah nation than they have become.”

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