

Top News of 2011: Japan Earthquake, Tsunami, Nuclear Crisis

2011 was a year of record-breaking natural disasters. Much of northern Japan was rattled to wreckage Friday, March 11. Charisma News has covered the tragedy and continues to report on relief teams and more regarding the event. Here is coverage directly following the earthquake and subsequent tsunamis.

The 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck shortly before 3 p.m. (local time) and spawned several tsunamis, including a 33-foot wave along the country's coastline.

The temblor was the fifth-largest to hit the world since 1900, and the tsunami it set off swallowed whole sections of land as it fanned out across the Pacific Ocean. Warnings were issued for 53 countries, including ones as far as Colombia and Peru.

Radiation contamination from damaged nuclear power reactors is also being reported. Aftershocks followed throughout the weekend as emergency workers scrambled to respond to the overwhelming needs. The death toll is also expected to rise.

It's the biggest nuclear crisis in decades as a third explosion erupts at Japan's already fragile nuclear plant that was damaged in the 8.9 magnitude earthquake.

The crisis is being compared to Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, two of the most devastating meltdowns in nuclear history.

The government ordered residents that live within 12 miles of the plant to leave. Another 140,000 people have been ordered to stay indoors and seal their doors and windows as radiation spread in the wake of the fire.

"Now we are talking about levels that can damage human health. These are readings taken near the area where we believe the releases are happening. Far away, the levels should be lower," said Yukio Edano, chief cabinet secretary. "Please do not go outside. Please stay indoors. Please close windows and make your homes airtight. Don't turn on ventilators. Please hang your laundry indoors."

The Fukushima facility has seen three blasts in the past four days. A fire also broke out at one of the reactor units on Tuesday, causing radiation leaks. This is especially dangerous because if the water in the pool begins to boil it, the fuel could ignite and send a plume of radiation into the atmosphere.

Seventy engineers in Japan are still scrambling to cool nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi facility. Non-essential personnel have evacuated as radiation levels become too dangerous for staff to man control rooms. Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency fears the suppression chamber may be damaged, which increases the risk of radiation leaks. International help has been enlisted to help contain the leak.