

Cities for a Nuclear Free Europe (CNFE)

Fukushima Nuclear Catastrophe – Ten Years Later

Online Event on March 12, 2021

This event was organized by WUA, the City of Vienna's Ombuds Office for Environmental Protection to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Fukushima in the framework of the Vienna-based Cities for a Nuclear Free Europe (CNFE) network in association with the Austrian Institute of Ecology.

An internal CNFE networking meeting was held in the morning, followed by a public conference in the afternoon, which consisted of two main topics: The experiences made during and after the disaster in Fukushima and the option for European cities in nuclear emergency preparedness.

The afternoon webinar focused on the state of the Fukushima site 10 years after an earthquake and tsunami overwhelmed the reactors, leading to meltdown of three of them. It was opened by Jürgen Czernohorszky, the Executive City Councillor for Climate, Environment, Democracy and Personnel of Vienna and Chair of Cities for Nuclear Free Europe. Mr. Czernohorszky introduced himself as the new CNFE Chair with an inspiring speech which showed his dedication to fight for a nuclear free Europe.

A keynote presentation was provided by Shaun Burnie of Greenpeace Japan. Greenpeace Japan's recent report highlighted the attempts by Japanese authorities to decontaminate the 'Special Decontamination Area' around Fukushima. The report argues this work has been inadequate, with an average of just 15% of the area being 'cleaned' to safe levels of radiation. This puts many of those who have returned to the area being placed at a health risk. The report is also concerned over unrealistic decommissioning plans for the site, believing it will be almost impossible to remove everything off the site over the next 30 – 40 years. The report puts forward practical ways to protect further leakage into the Pacific Ocean of contaminated water from the site.

Also speaking with representatives from the Mayors for a Nuclear Power Free Japan network, including the former Mayor Sakurai Katsunobu of Minamisoma, one of the towns close to the Fukushima Daiichi most affected by the disaster. He outlined the real problems that occurred after the disaster and the lack of guidance from the Japanese Government or nuclear authorities. He outlined attempts to allow people back to the area over the last few years and the recent damage in the area with another earthquake just a few weeks ago.

Kazuo Sato, the Chair of the network, outlined how they were trying to influence and challenge Japanese policy to move away from nuclear power and towards renewable energy. The second half of the webinar considered nuclear safety and emergency planning issues in Europe - one of the focal responses following the disaster.

Gabriele Mraz from the Austrian Institute of Ecology highlighted the innovative 'flexRISK' database which considers the impacts should a nuclear disaster occur in Europe in terms of how radioactive elements could spread depending on weather formations. In the panel discussion, CNFE Lead Officer David Reinberger and NFLA Secretary Sean Morris outlined how nuclear emergency planning regulations changed as a result of Fukushima in Austria and the UK. The conclusion for larger cities was very clear and very concerning: Information and staying inside are the key measure, iodine prophylaxis might not be used effectively because the tablets need to be distributed ahead of time (best stored at home), evacuation not being a feasible option in case of a severe nuclear fall-out after an accident in a nuclear power plant.

The conference speakers and the audience in the discussion later agreed that the CNFE network needs to continue in working towards a phasing out of nuclear power in favor of renewable energy,

energy efficiency and energy storage. Fukushima was a reminder of the environmental catastrophe that can take place anywhere and anytime as long as nuclear power plants are allowed to operate.

For a link to the presentations from the CNFE organized webinar go to
http://www.ecology.at/wua_fukushima_event.htm.

'flexRISK' database assessing the risk of severe nuclear accidents in Europe:
<http://flexrisk.boku.ac.at/en/index.html>.