

Chernobyl: 20 years later

19 April 2006



Chernobyl, the most significant accident in nuclear history, took place on 26 April 1986. Even 20 years later, the accident has left the world with many unanswered questions about its impact on human health, the environment, and the socio-economic sector.

To provide some answers, GreenFacts has released a Three-Level Summary of Chernobyl's Legacy, a report published in March 2006 by the Chernobyl Forum. This forum included hundreds of experts from, e.g., the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"I was pleased to assist you in this work", said Dr. Burton Bennett, chairman of the Chernobyl Forum and reviewer of the GreenFacts summary of Chernobyl's Legacy. "I wish to compliment you in your good efforts to clarify issues about the environment."

Highlights of the report

At the time of the accident, large parts of Europe were contaminated by radioactive materials. The greatest contamination occurred around the reactor in areas that are now part of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Focusing on that region,

Chernobyl's Legacy compiled the latest research on the accident's impact on humans, plants, animals, as well as the economy.

By 2005, according to the report, about 50 people – most of them emergency workers – are known to have died of either Acute Radiation Syndrome (ARS) or cancer as a direct consequence of the accident. A considerable increase in thyroid cancer has been observed especially among local children, though the survival rate has been high. In the long term, the report estimates that the accident might lead to about 4000 cancer deaths among the 600 000 most exposed people. However, estimations are difficult because those who have been exposed to radiation often die from the same causes as unexposed people.

The report indicates that many people were traumatised by the accident and the rapid relocation that followed; they remain anxious about their health, perceiving themselves as helpless victims rather than survivors. Current government aid programs that pay benefits to millions of people are a great burden on national budgets and the Chernobyl Forum recommends that financial support be refocused on those who need it most. Others may need help to normalise their lives, or better access to social services, employment, and credible information about the effects of the accident. Stimulating a growing confidence among the region's population would be an essential step towards redeveloping the local economy and fighting increasing poverty in the area.

The GreenFacts summary is freely available on www.greenfacts.org/chernobyl

Source: GreenFacts

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