*Worldwide Response to the Disaster in Chernobyl*

Worldwide responses to the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in Ukraine were generally similar regardless of which country you look at. This similarity of reaction was seen at both a governmental and public level. One thing which is very clear, is the event’s impact on future nuclear program growth. In the aftermath of Chernobyl, many countries decided to cancel their plans for nuclear power plant construction. After Chernobyl until today, only Mexico, Iran, Romania and China have completed construction of their first nuclear power plants and enter a group of only 30 countries which utilize nuclear power.

On the flip side, there are many effects which influence the support for nuclear energy generation. Nuclear energy is regarded as a carbon neutral energy source, so therefore is more environmentally friendly than coal or oil. This combined with the oil shocks of the 1970s moved countries away from reliance on oil. Despite the perceived risks, even in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, this made nuclear an enticing option. For example, France in 1974 started a substantial nuclear energy program because of the oil shocks at the time. Even so, worldwide support has always been a bit limited when it comes to nuclear power due to fear in the wake of Chernobyl.

This disaster also began a worldwide change in the level of safety and regulation of nuclear power plants. This is shown very clearly with the United States’ recent advances in safety concerning their nuclear reactors. The first important difference is how the plants are built. Nuclear reactors in the United States have features which prevent radioactive releases on a large scale. Plant operators in the Chernobyl incident tried to hide the accident from the local population, and thus proper evacuation did not occur until approximately 36 hours after the disaster. In the United States, operators of nuclear reactors are required to notify the police within 15 minutes of seeing signs of potential leak, even if the leak has not yet occurred. There are inspectors at every nuclear reactor in the United States to make sure all regulations are followed. This level of safety is not present in all countries, however.

In conclusion, while the physical effects of Chernobyl were mostly limited to Ukraine, the social effects were felt all around the world. While it is difficult to calculate all the victims of this disaster due to the long term radiation effects, many people were directly affected, and this caused a great amount of fear to be felt all around the world. This fear is one of the biggest obstacles to nuclear power today. In America there has not been a major incident with a nuclear reactor since Three Mile Island in 1979, but even so nuclear reactors are widely viewed as unsafe. Major strides are still left to be taken in both the safety of operating nuclear power plants and the public perception on their relative safety.