

Tragedy All Around Us

How do you write about a tragedy where more than 12 000 people have lost their lives and another 14 000 or more are missing (estimates at this writing)? The human brain cannot comprehend these numbers in any kind of logical fashion. And then there are the more than hundred thousand people with no running water, no electricity, and no home but a cot in a shelter somewhere. No jobs to go to, because their workplaces have vanished. And with roads blocked and harbors destroyed, the usual logistics routes have been turned upside down. That's the big picture of what Japan is dealing with, in the wake of the March 11 9.0-scale earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

The smaller picture for Japan focuses on the continuing situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, where four nuclear reactors are in various states of instability or damage and where, again at this writing, heroic workers are scrambling daily with new problems or new attempts to resolve old problems, all the while knowing that they are being exposed to levels of radiation they never expected to see at their jobs, levels of radiation that may affect their future health and their longevity.

Earlier this year, the small city of Christchurch, New Zealand, was devastated by its own earthquake. The month of April saw nearly 700 tornadoes in the United States, with hundreds of people dead or injured and thousands now homeless. A little more than a year ago, Haiti and Chile both suffered devastating earthquakes.

Every day, people we know and love face heartbreaking diagnoses of deadly diseases, or lose loved ones in

various kinds of inexplicable accidents. Tragedy is all around us, and sometimes, it just gets to be too much.

I feel the need to write about the ongoing nuclear situation in Japan, because that's what readers probably expect when they turn to this page. But the nuclear situation is only a small part of what Japan is dealing with, and am I being parochial to focus only on the nuclear plants? Well, you might say, this magazine is called *Radwaste Solutions*, so that's my brief and that's what I need to cover. But while I'm a magazine editor, I'm a human being first, and the human being in me is utterly saddened by the scope of tragedy in that country. To focus on the stability or instability of the plants' spent fuel pools or on the releases, both deliberate and inadvertent, of contaminated water into the nearby ocean seems a bit petty to me in the wake of the larger picture.

So forgive me if just this one time, I cannot get my mind to narrow its scope. Instead, I think of the hundreds of small children who have lost their parents and/or siblings; of hundreds of parents who cannot locate their children; of whole families and towns summarily gone—vanished, without a trace, as they say. I think of people in overcrowded shelters, trying to be patient and understanding, while shivering from the cold and suffering from inadequate amounts of food and liquids, all the while knowing that even once they are warm and well-fed, they will have no homes to go back to, because those homes no longer exist.

You will find excellent coverage of the Japanese nuclear situation in the April and May issues (and probably the June issue as well) of this maga-



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zine's sister publication, *Nuclear News*. I suggest that *Radwaste Solutions* readers turn to those pages for continuing updates on attempts to stabilize Japan's badly damaged nuclear units. This magazine's own "Headlines" section will also address those issues at the Japanese plant related to waste management and facility cleanup. But on this page, just this once, let me think about the bigger picture.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor ■