



Pugwash
conferences
on science and
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British Pugwash Discussion Meeting

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Lessons of Fukushima

Dr Mike Weightman

Just before the first anniversary of the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami, British Pugwash invited Dr Mike Weightman, who is responsible for the independent regulation of the safety and security of the UK nuclear industry, to address a British Pugwash discussion meeting at University College London. He outlined the results of his international fact-finding mission to Japan in May 2011 on behalf of the IAEA and its implications for the British nuclear industry.

He outlined the actual events at the TEPCO Fukushima Dai-ichi site, examining the extent of damage on the site and efforts to contain radiation emissions and cool the reactors in the face of the loss of external as well as local power sources.

In a report published in October 2011 on the issues raised for Japan, he particularly stressed the health, social and economic implications. These included the loss of access to land, reduced energy sources and loss of confidence both in nuclear power as an energy source and the government's record in handling the crisis.

He then turned to the implications for the UK nuclear industry and the lessons to be learned. He argued that UK nuclear systems are different from those in Japan but stressed the importance of not only enhancing technical safety measures and preparedness, but also increasing openness and enhancing the safety culture within the industry.

He concluded with two questions:

- Was it an institutional and cultural failing rather than a failure of science, engineering or people?
- Are the hazards and consequences of nuclear power more about the potential social, political and economic impact than physical harm to people?