

Not good, on a number of fronts:

- The official death count is now past 7000, as reported by [CNN](#).
- Another ten thousand are still missing.
- The [NY Times](#) reports that the Japanese government has finally raised the level of the event to 5, the same level as Three Mile Island.
- Here's a really scary statement from the same *Times* story: "Tokyo Electric Power Company, which operates the plant, said earlier this week that there was a possibility of 'recriticality,' in which fission would resume if fuel rods melted and the uranium pellets slumped into a jumble together on the floor of a storage pool or reactor core." I had seen a discussion of this possibility on a blog but dismissed it as too alarmist.
- Not surprisingly, according to [another story](#) in the *Times*, foreigners are seeking to flee Japan. UC Berkeley sent an email to all faculty and students yesterday urging them not to visit Japan and offering assistance to those who are already there.

With luck, the nuclear situation will be resolved without a major radiation release. The Washington Post has a [story](#) arguing that time is in our favor, at least as to the reactors themselves, because heat production from the rods will decline as the short-lived fission by-products decay. That isn't true of the storage facility, however, which may now present the more severe threat. The key in both cases is to get enough coolant into the system. Let's hope for the best.