

Fact Sheet
on
U.S. Nuclear Powered Warship (NPW) Safety

1. Commitments of the U.S. Government about the Safety of U.S. NPWs

U.S. Nuclear Powered Warships (NPWs) have safely operated for more than 50 years without experiencing any reactor accident or any release of radioactivity that hurt human health or had an adverse effect on marine life. Naval reactors have an outstanding record of over 134 million miles safely steamed on nuclear power, and they have amassed over 5700 reactor-years of safe operation.

Currently, the U.S. has 83 nuclear-powered ships: 72 submarines, 10 aircraft carriers and one research vessel. These NPWs make up about forty percent of major U.S. naval combatants, and they visit over 150 ports in over 50 countries, including approximately 70 ports in the U.S. and three in Japan.

Regarding the safety of NPWs visiting Japanese ports, the U.S. Government has made firm commitments including those in the Aide-Memoire of 1964; the Statement by the U.S. Government on Operation of Nuclear Powered Warships in Foreign Ports of 1964; the Aide-Memoire of 1967; and the Memorandum of Conversation of 1968. Since 1964 U.S. NPWs have visited Japanese ports (i.e., Yokosuka, Sasebo and White Beach) more than 1200 times. The results of monitoring in these ports conducted by the Government of Japan and the U.S. Government, respectively, demonstrate that the operation of U.S. NPWs does not result in any increase in the general background radioactivity of the environment. The U.S. Government states that every single aspect of these commitments continues to be firmly in place. Particularly, the U.S. Government confirms that all safety precautions and procedures followed in connection with operations in U.S. ports will be strictly observed in foreign ports, including Japanese ports. Also, the U.S. Government notes here that its commitments are supported by concrete measures that ensure the safety of U.S. NPWs and that are continuously being updated and strengthened.

2. Naval Reactor Plant Design

All U.S. NPWs use pressurized water reactors (PWRs). PWRs have an established safety history, their operational behavior and risks are understood, and they are the basic design used for approximately 60% of the commercial nuclear power plants in the world.

The mission that naval reactors support is different from the mission of commercial reactors. All NPWs are designed to survive wartime attack and to continue to fight while