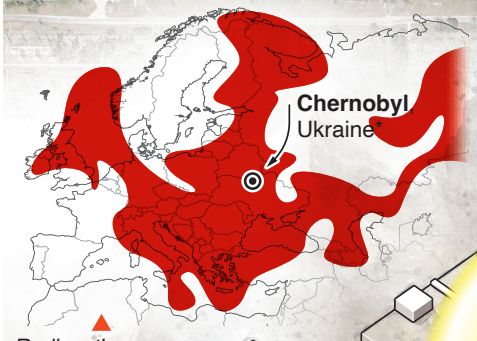
Forty years on, Chernobyl is in trouble again

April 26, 1986 marks the worst civilian nuclear disaster in history when reactor 4 at *Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant* exploded, blowing the top off the reactor and discharging huge amounts of radiation into the atmosphere. Fast-forward four decades and a 2025 drone strike that set fire to the shelter protecting the shattered remains is expected to need hundreds of millions of dollars of repairs





Radioactive contamination spreads across Europe, shown on May 3, 1986

Plant was intended to have **12** nuclear reactors and would have been largest in world had accident not occurred

1. Apr 26, 1986: Operators, conducting test to observe reactor at low power, remove most control rods *(used to slow nuclear reactions)* and lose control of flow of coolant. ***RBMK-1000*** reactor's flawed design makes it unstable at low power levels, further exacerbated by key safety features being deactivated

2. 01:23am‡: Power surge causes **two explosions**, blasting top of reactor through roof and spewing tonnes of radioactive fallout far and wide

3. Apr 26-May 9: Cleanup operation begins. Approximately **500,000** workers drafted in, some braving lethal radiation levels, with **31** firefighters and technicians dying within days from acute radiation sickness. Some **115,000** people evacuated from surrounding area

4. May-Nov: Hastily constructed concrete ***sarcophagus*** built to encase ruins of reactor – suppresses **95%** of radioactive material inside it

5. Nov 14-29, 2016: ***New Safe Confinement*** *(NSC)* shelter slides into place, enclosing reactor and original sarcophagus, which is now crumbling and in danger of collapse. Later, additional structural supports are added to sarcophagus to shore it up

6. Feb 14, 2025: Shelter hit by ***Shahed-136*** – Iranian-made attack drone of type used by Russia against Ukraine – punching hole in NSC *(breaking hermetic seal)* and causing fire that burns for **17 days**. Cost of repair estimated to be around **$600m**

*Part of Soviet Union at that time (modern country boundaries shown). †There were actually 211 control rods

Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Financial Times, AFP, BBC, Graphic News Archive, Getty Images

‡Local time

Satellite image: Google Earth Pro

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