Environmental Impacts of Coastal Nuclear Power Plants: The Role of Early Warning Systems in Managing Radioactive Contamination

Veysel KOÇ[1], Fatma CENGİZ[2]

[1]Mergen Aero, Ankara/Türkiye,(mergenaero@gmail.com)
[2]Health Science University, Ankara/Türkiye,(ftmacz@gmail.com)

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Nuclear energy has been a crucial part of global energy strategies since the mid-20th century, valued for its low carbon emissions and its potential to mitigate climate change. As countries seek alternatives to fossil fuels, nuclear energy emerges as a cleaner, more sustainable option. However, despite these benefits, nuclear energy poses significant environmental risks, particularly in the context of coastal nuclear power plants that rely on seawater for cooling. The use of seawater increases the risk of radioactive contamination, threatening marine ecosystems, which are highly sensitive to such pollutants.

The catastrophic events at Chernobyl in 1986 and Fukushima in 2011 underscored the environmental dangers of nuclear energy. Both disasters released large amounts of radioactive materials, including cesium-137 (Cs-137) and strontium-90 (Sr-90), into the environment, leading to widespread contamination of land, air, and especially marine ecosystems. These isotopes have long half-lives, allowing them to persist in the environment for decades and causing long-term damage through bioaccumulation and biomagnification in marine food webs. This contamination not only affects marine life but also poses serious risks to human health, especially in communities reliant on seafood.

Coastal nuclear power plants, of which there are around 100 globally as of 2024, are often situated in areas of high energy demand and abundant water resources. However, their proximity to sensitive marine environments increases the likelihood of radioactive materials entering the ocean, either through planned discharges or accidental leaks. Given the interconnectedness of oceanic systems, radioactive contamination from one site can spread across vast areas, impacting global marine biodiversity.

To address these risks, the study emphasizes the need for advanced early warning systems, such as radiation detection buoys, which can monitor radioactive materials in seawater in real time. These buoys are equipped with sensors that detect even minimal increases in radioactive isotopes, providing critical data that can enable rapid responses to contamination. Integrating such systems into the operational protocols of coastal nuclear power plants is essential for enhancing environmental protection and safety.

The study also highlights the importance of international cooperation and technological innovation in managing radioactive contamination. The implementation of radiation detection buoys should be prioritized globally, particularly in regions with coastal nuclear power plants. These systems not only strengthen safety measures but also contribute to the sustainable protection of marine ecosystems.

In conclusion, while nuclear energy plays a vital role in reducing carbon emissions, its environmental risks, particularly to marine ecosystems, cannot be ignored. The use of advanced monitoring technologies, like radiation detection buoys, is crucial for minimizing the impact of potential nuclear accidents. Ensuring the safety of coastal nuclear power plants through such measures is imperative for protecting both the environment and public health.

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