

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/12 : CIA-RDP08S01350R000300900002-4



Directorate of Intelligence

~~Secret~~



25X1

*File*

# The Chernobyl' Accident: Social and Political Implications



25X1

A Research Paper

~~Secret~~

SOV 87-10078X  
December 1987

Copy 367

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/12 : CIA-RDP08S01350R000300900002-4



Excerpt 1:

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/12 : CIA-RDP08S01350R000300900002-4

Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

**The Chernobyl' Accident:  
Social and Political  
Implications**

[Redacted]

25X1

**Summary**

*Information available  
as of 5 December 1987  
was used in this report.*

The explosion of the Chernobyl' nuclear reactor in April 1986 presented a serious problem for Gorbachev's efforts to portray the new leadership as a reasonable and accountable government. The accident led to the emergence of nuclear energy policy as a significant public issue. Moscow's delay in reporting the accident to its people and neighbors left it open to charges of disregard for public health and eroded confidence in the regime. The psychological consequences of the Chernobyl' accident are likely to be long term and not limited to the immediately affected geographic areas.

[Redacted]

25X1

Excerpt 2:

Regime claims that radiation fallout from Chernobyl' will not add significantly to the normal incidence of cancer have not silenced rumors and anxiety about health issues. A large segment of the population living in the European section of the USSR apparently believes it is in danger from radiation and continues to link genetic abnormalities, cancers, and poor health in general to the accident. These concerns are probably greatest among the 135,000 evacuees and more than 20,000 recovery workers—mainly military reservists—nearly all of whom are non-Russians.

[Redacted]

25X1

We have evidence of considerable fear of contaminated food and water that is likely to continue. The effects of this fear were still being felt in the farmers' markets this past summer, and Moscow probably is concerned that this apprehension could result in workers' resistance to transfers to the Chernobyl' region, an inability to sell products from the region, and increased demand for medical services.

[Redacted]

25X1



Excerpt 3:

Chernobyl' also had an adverse impact on the regime's credibility. More than a year after the accident, Soviet citizens continue to criticize top officials for initially concealing the Chernobyl' accident, and some think the regime's response to the disaster exposed the insincerity of Gorbachev's openness (*glasnost*) policy. [redacted]

25X1

v

Secret

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/12 : CIA-RDP08S01350R000300900002-4

Secret

[redacted]

25X1

The regime brought many of these problems on itself by initially reacting with its traditional secrecy. Immediately after the accident, an information blackout was imposed until international pressure forced a grudging admission followed by a propaganda counterattack. Gorbachev himself remained silent until 14 May, almost three weeks after the accident, probably to minimize his personal responsibility and to wait for his experts to gain control of the situation. [redacted]

25X1

Once Gorbachev got involved, however, he exploited the initial public relations setback to push his own reform agenda. By demonstrating that suppressing information about domestic problems can backfire, the accident gave added impetus to his drive for openness in the Soviet media. Several articles in *Pravda*, for example, pointed out that a lack of complete information had encouraged harmful rumors, and supporters of Gorbachev's policy criticized the domestic media's early silence. [redacted]

25X1

