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To the Editor
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Business Week's "Sleepless Nights" chart with the Sept. 19 "Next Big One" article shows unsupportable, misinformed "projections" of the possible effects of a nuclear power plant accident. The numbers quoted in the chart have no basis in reality and do not reflect the most recent information about the effects of the 1986 nuclear power plant accident in Chernobyl, the worst the world has seen.

Many aspects of U.S. reactor design, operator training and emergency preparedness make a repeat of Chernobyl in the United States next to impossible, but the effects of that accident still provide the only reasonable benchmark for your chart. Less than two weeks ago the United Nations issued, to wide media coverage, a report on Chernobyl involving 100 scientists from several U.N. agencies and several countries affected by the accident.

Based on the best available information gathered in the 20 years since the accident, the U.N. report concludes that, of the more than 100,000 plant workers and personnel involved in responding to the accident, about 50 died as a result of radiation exposure. Among the 4,000 children who developed thyroid cancer as a result of ingesting radioactive iodine from the accident, nine died. The report also estimated that, among the more than 500,000 people who received above-normal radiation doses associated with the accident, about 4,000 people could ultimately die of cancer caused by Chernobyl exposure.

A toll of 4,000 possible deaths from a nuclear power plant accident is still a disaster and unacceptable, but nonetheless represent the best-documented figures for a chart such as the one you published. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's regulations and ongoing oversight of U.S. nuclear plants focus on preventing accidents and protecting the public if an accident were to occur. Your readers are best served by numbers based on fact and deliberate study, not wildly inaccurate projections meant to grab attention.

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