



AS IT IS

Site of Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster May Apply for UNESCO Protection

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Are you interested in a visit to the site of the world's worst nuclear power accident?

The government of Ukraine hopes so.

The country's culture minister is requesting that the United Nations add the Chernobyl disaster area to its list of world heritage sites, meaning those of exceptional historic importance. The sites are then recognized as protected places.

April 26 will mark the 35th anniversary of the disaster, caused by an explosion of a nuclear reactor. The center was testing its emergency operations system at the time. Thirty-one power plant workers and firefighters died from radiation poisoning immediately after the explosion. Thousands of other people died in the years that followed from cancer and other conditions linked to radiation poisoning. The total number of dead from the disaster is disputed.

The nuclear plant is located near the town of Pripyat, about 100 kilometers north of Kiev.

Townpeople were ordered to leave to safer areas. All that remains in the area is the nuclear complex itself, damaged buildings and trees and plants that have grown in and around the wreckage.

In 2019, the American television company HBO produced a fictional series based on the nuclear accident. It increased public interest in the disaster. Over 100,000 people visited Chernobyl that year.

UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural organization, would decide whether to make it a protected area. But first, Ukraine needs to add Chernobyl to a national list of historically important locations. Then it can continue with its UNESCO request.

Oleksandr Tkachenko is Ukraine's culture minister.

He said the importance of Chernobyl “**lays** far beyond Ukraine's borders...” UNESCO protection of the site is not just about, in his words “**commemoration**, but also history and people's rights.”

Ukraine will have to make repairs to the nuclear site and the nearby town if the site wins UNESCO recognition.

UNESCO will not consider adding Chernobyl as a world heritage site before 2022.

Some other UNESCO heritage sites around the world include: Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the Schönbrunn Palace in Austria, China's Great Wall, the old town of Dubrovnik in Croatia and Ecuador's Galapagos Islands.

I'm Dan Friedell.

Margaryta Chornokondratenko wrote this story for Reuters. Dan Friedell adapted it for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.

Would you travel to Ukraine to see the Chernobyl site? Tell us in the Comments Section and [visit our Facebook page](#).

Words in This Story

lay -*v.* used to describe the location of something in a nonspecific way

commemoration -*n.* something (such as a special ceremony) that is intended to honor an important event or person from the past

