

Chernobyl

Intermediate Committee: 1986

Background:

April 26th, 1986. In the Soviet industrial city of Pripyat, the worst nuclear disaster in history occurred. Due to a power surge in the reactor systems, the fissile material and the other components of the reactor core melted, with further fires and explosions scattering contaminated material into the wind. What followed was the most extensive cleanup effort for any disaster in history, mobilizing half a million people and costing billions. Even in the present day, efforts continue and are not expected to stop until 2065. Humanity will have left an invisible impression on the landscape that will endure for millennia.

The decisions of this committee will determine the future of this world, for their present is our past. The leaders, witnesses, and experts gathered must first address the imminent threat and direct the cleanup effort, and then turn to the deeper questions: why did this happen? What does this disaster change? Who, if anybody, should be punished? What can we tell the world?

The composition of this committee is unique. Many of you have no political qualifications or experience, but the power of a witness cannot be ignored. What you know and have seen is as equally important to the success of this committee as the presence of Gorbachev himself. The same is true for the experts: your knowledge and past research will be invaluable to the policymakers.

Of course, the policymakers will have considerations and motivations very different from those of regular citizens. You will have to consider your place in the Party, the Soviet Union's place in the world, and the people's perception of this disaster.

In this committee, you will be representing a person, not a country or organization. You will be a face, not a speaking tube. You will have personal interests, past experiences, and a personality. Put yourself into the perspective of a traumatized worker seeking the support of the Party; the perspective of a scientist desperately providing a voice of reason; and the perspective of a politician, working to keep their world intact. You will not necessarily make “good” or “moral” choices; perhaps you will. But if those choices make no sense with your personal motivations, then you will be wrong.

Just as you should always research all information related to the crisis, you should also always research everything about your character. Not every person in this committee will have enough information on them for you to fully understand them, so you can be more free in your interpretation then. But if you are an important, well-documented person, then you should do what you believe that they would do. That can be different from what they actually did. It is your choice, but every choice should be informed. Please inform yourself before the committee with your own research. Personally, I recommend a close reading of Wikipedia articles relating to the disaster and your role.

Awards will be determined on the quality of your rhetoric, the impact you have on the crisis, and how well you draw on the experience and knowledge of your role.

I do not recommend relying on the remainder of this background guide, for reasons that may become apparent if you read it. Rely on your own research.

Committee Overview:

Welcome to the Historic Crisis Committee: Chernobyl 1986. Delegates will take on the roles of key Soviet political leaders, nuclear engineers, military officials, and first responders as the worst nuclear disaster in human history unfolds. On April 26, 1986, Reactor No. 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Ukrainian SSR exploded during a late-night safety test. The fallout of the disaster extended far beyond the physical explosion—revealing serious flaws in scientific protocol, political transparency, disaster response, and the Soviet system itself.

In this committee, delegates will be expected to react to quickly changing developments in real time. While some roles have the power to directly communicate to the public, control military resources, or call for evacuations, others must defend their scientific decisions or confront the regime that censors criticism.

The goal is not only to contain the reactor meltdown, but to maintain the Soviet government.

The Explosion:

On April 26, 1986, during an intended trial of safety designed to act as a power outage, a series of mistakes in process and design issues led to a reaction that couldn't be controlled inside of **Reactor 4**. The outcome was a large steam eruption that blew the 2,000,000 pound reactor lid into the air, exposing the reactor core and releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere.

The people working in the control room were left dazed, not believing what happened. A lot of them thought that a steam tank burst and didn't realize the gravity of the situation.

As all this was happening, firefighters came to put out what they thought was just a normal electrical fire. They didn't know, however, that they were about to walk into a nuclear nightmare.

Committee Roles & Character Backgrounds

Political Leadership & Oversight:

- **Mikhail Gorbachev** (*General Secretary, Soviet Union*)
Architect of **glasnost** and **perestroika**, Gorbachev faced a pivotal test of these policies when Chernobyl erupted. His leadership set the tone for transparency, though the Soviet system often deferred to secrecy in the face of crisis.
- **Volodymyr Shcherbytsky** (*First Secretary, Ukrainian Communist Party*)
As Ukraine's top Party official, he balanced political pressure from Moscow with the need to manage local fallout—both literal and political—in the Ukrainian SSR.

- **Nikolai Ryzhkov** (*Chairman of the Council of Ministers*)
As the Soviet premier, he coordinated the broader governmental response, including resource allocation, logistics, and interfacing with regional authorities.
- **Boris Shcherbina** (*Deputy Chairman, Disaster Commission Head*)
Dispatched hours after the explosion, Shcherbina headed the State Commission. He ordered Prip'yat's evacuation on April 27, coordinated the reactor firefighting and cleanup, oversaw the construction of the sarcophagus, and publicly acknowledged failures—unusual for Soviet officials.
- **Yegor Ligachev** (*High-Ranking Party Official*)
A Soviet hardliner skeptical of reformist policies, Ligachev's voice in the Politburo contributed to internal tensions over information control and crisis response.
- **Viktor Chebrikov** (*Head of KGB*)
Tasked with managing internal security, surveillance, and censorship, information began leaking both in and out of security guidelines.
- **Valentin Pavlov** (*Chairman, State Committee on Prices*)
Held sway over economic channels and resource distribution—vital during crisis management and resource mobilization for containment and relief.

Scientific & Investigative Personnel

- **Valery Legasov** (*Lead Chemist in the Government Commission*)
The First Deputy Director of the Kurchatov Institute, a chemist by training,

Legasov was uniquely positioned at Chernobyl—assigned in part because of proximity and availability. He pushed for evacuation, guided firefighting strategies, flew over the reactor, helped contain fallout, and gave a landmark five-hour presentation to the IAEA that candidly addressed both design faults and systemic failures. Though internationally praised, he was ostracized at home and tragically took his own life two years after the disaster.

- **Evgeny Velikhov** (*Nuclear Physicist, Commission Member*)
Replaced Legasov in formal hierarchy over time and led technical containment discussions—especially around the use of underground cooling systems to prevent reactor material from reaching groundwater.
- **Anatoly Alexandrov** (*Chief Reactor Designer, RAS President*)
Chaired the academy and played a role in dispatching Legasov to the site; defended RBMK reactor design while facing accountability for its flaws.
- **Yuri Izrael** (*Meteorologist / Climate Advisor*)
Provided critical modeling of radioactive dispersion, informed evacuation zone sizing, and public safety perimeters.
- **Sergei Yankovsky** (*Investigation Head into Plant Leadership*)
Spearheaded early inquiries into plant management practices and Director Bryukhanov's conduct.

Plant Staff & Operators

- **Viktor Bryukhanov** (*Plant Director*)
Oversaw Reactor 4; later criticized for mismanagement and delays in approving safety tests.

- **Nikolai Fomin** (*Chief Engineer*)
Supported safety test continuation despite growing concerns.
 - **Anatoly Dyatlov** (*Deputy Chief Engineer*)
Presided over the ill-fated safety test that triggered the meltdown.
 - **Leonid Toptunov, Aleksandr Akimov, Alesandr Kovalenko, Valery Perevozchenko, Yuri Badaev, Yuri Tregub, Viktor Degtyarenko**
These plant engineers and operators were present during the chain of missteps and reactions—working under shifting directives and immense pressure during and immediately after the disaster.
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First Responders & Cleanup Heroes

- **Leonid Telyatnikov** (*Chief of Plant Fire Department*)
Led the initial fire suppression operations and risked exposure to radioactivity to contain the spread.
- **Vasily Ignatenko** (*Firefighter*)
Among the first on-site, he ultimately succumbed to radiation poisoning.
- **Nikolai Tarakanov** (*Cleanup Oversight Commander*)
Directed military and logistical elements of the cleanup operation in subsequent months.
- **Alexei Ananenko** (*Engineer, “Suicide Squad” Member*)
Part of the team that drained the crucial steam suppression pools beneath Reactor 4—a mission that helped prevent a second catastrophic explosion. Honored with the title *Hero of Ukraine* decades later.
- **Maria Protsenko** (*Pripyat Chief Architect*)
Organized the rapid evacuation of Pripyat’s residents under chaotic and

bureaucratically restrained circumstances.

Medical & Security Authorities

- **Oleg P. Shchepin** (*Deputy Health Minister*)
Monitored emerging health crises, tracked radiation-related illnesses, and advised public health directives.
- **Vasyl Durdynets** (*Acting Ukrainian Interior Minister*)
Coordinated internal security forces, public order, and civil responses in the Ukrainian SSR.
- **Vladimir Pikalov** (*Commander, Chemical Troops*)
Mobilized specialized chemical units to decontaminate and secure the site and surrounding zones.

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