

Safecast was started in 2011 in the immediate aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdowns. Initially as word started to get out about the disaster, there was a lot of concern. People were worried for their own safety as well as the safety of their friends and family. That concern turned to confusion pretty quickly as information being provided by the authorities was vague, incomplete, contradictory, and often dismissive. This created an atmosphere for a number of people who, frustrated by what they perceived as an insufficient response, felt that they might be able to help, and decided to do something. Different people have different skill sets equipment and access, but they all did what they could. People who were doing things to help I often found the other people who were doing things to help and they began to collaborate, and it was those initial collaborations of the helpers that ended up being the community that Safecast was born from.

The immediate differences between Fukushima in 2011 and today with COVID-19 are that, in 2011, the event happened without any warning and everything after that point was recovery and rebuilding. With the pandemic that we're experiencing today it's not only something that we've been warned about for decades, but also something that is ongoing, without any clearly defined "event" but rather a series of unfolding events, one after another, and currently each one worse than the previous, without any clear understanding of when that will change. The similarities are far more striking. There's an invisible threat – neither radiation nor infection can be seen with the naked eye – and people are concerned about their safeties, and again, that of their friends and families. Once again we're seeing that officially provided information is vague, incomplete, sometimes contradictory, and often dismissive. The trust is collapsing. People feel like they can't count on officials for help or a straight story, and so they are turning to each other, taking it upon themselves to try to solve the problems, and sharing what they can, and what they are doing, and learning from each other so that they can all benefit. Also Fukushima was a fairly localized event, while the coronavirus is global, and that just multiplies all of these factors by a hundred.

Safecast has continued to grow over the last nine years, collecting the largest radiation data set that's ever been amassed. This has been possible only because of our commitment to openness and transparency. With trust in officials and authorities lost, people have been desperate to find things that they can put their faith into, and a project where everything is open and can be checked, double-checked, and cross-referenced, that isn't taking a political position and is

very clearly focused on providing something useful, is something that people have felt good about being a part of.

People want to help and they've been able to see tangible results from their efforts with Safecast, and that kind of thing continues to bring in more people. Because we publish everything into the public domain, people are not required to ask our permission to use our work, nor are required to credit us after they do.

Most do, because it's the right thing to do, but we could never fully know the extent of the impact that we've had. That said, we know our data has been used in countless reports and in research, and our policies and methods are being used examples of best practices and international guidelines have been published using our approach as the guide.

By publishing things the way that we do, we've changed the expectation from the public, and in any cases official organisations and institutions have had to readjust their practices in order to keep up.

Because Safecast is a primarily volunteer organization, it's very important to us that our efforts are useful. We don't want to ask people to help us just do something that other groups, possibly with more resources and expertise, are already doing better than we ever could.

So rather than just rushing in, we've tried to cautiously look at what's happening and then come up with something that we can do that's useful.

The results of that are evolving. The first thing that we did was really just look at our experience – what we learned after Fukushima and in the aftermath – and how those lessons might be useful today, and try to share that with the public.

Following that, we've looked around at what others are doing and trying to find the best examples and the things that we think might be most useful to the widest audience, and help put those into the spotlight.

One thing that we weren't seeing a lot of was discussion about testing and people who were not able to get testing primarily. So at the moment we're developing a map, which we've just released, that helps show how in different areas some people are able to get tested easier and in other areas, people who would like to get tested are being rejected, and documents their experiences.

Hopefully this will help expand testing in a number of these areas and provide better information for these communities. We're going to continue to look at what's going on and see where our expertise and our team might be useful, and continue to develop new things along the way.

Given our experience over the last nine years, there are a number of key lessons that we've learned that public institutions and media might benefit from these days.

For public institutions and governments and officials, we really

recommend that you prioritize transparency.

There's no outcome where misleading the public today is beneficial tomorrow and conversely honesty will pay future dividends. Safety first.

Really, do not risk long-term health of your constituents for short-term political gain. Keeping people from getting sick should be a non-partisan issue. We like to say that trust is a non-renewable resource. This is in the 1920s anymore and people have many sources of information that they can turn to. If they don't feel like they can trust what you are telling them, then they will simply look someplace else and not come back.

To that end, effective messaging is crucial. You need to get your very best crisis communicators in front of the public often and let them do their thing.

If politicians demand to be a part of this media appearance, then they should be limited to a very brief expression of compassion and concern and then they should hand it over to the experts immediately.

Experts should not be put in a situation where they have to immediately correct or contradict things that politicians have just said.

Finally, travel bans, quarantines, school closures, these are all very highly disruptive measures and they should not be enacted without carefully thinking through the repercussions, ramifications, and difficulty in deciding when to stop them.

The specific conditions of their implementation and for ending things like travel bans should be explicit before they are enacted and carefully explained to the public beforehand.

To the media, we would ask that you resist the urge to rush for scoops or things that haven't been fact-checked. Misinformation spreads much faster and is more persistent than after the fact corrections.

Similarly you should fact-check all claims and provide sources for assertions, citing scientists and institutions by name and avoid unnamed government officials.

Finally if your site is pay walled, please consider disabling this function for articles that are relating to the situation.

We understand that people need to be paid for their work but restricting information that can have an impact on health of the entire population to only those who can afford it is not a good policy.