

Fukushima: No-go zone trespassers face fines, arrest

Government vows to clear holdouts from evacuation area

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The government declared the 20-km evacuation area around the radiation-spewing Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant a no-go zone Thursday, urging residents to abide by the order for their own safety or possibly face fines or detention.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said the order would take effect at midnight Thursday and was meant to prevent unrestricted entry into the mostly deserted area, which was ordered evacuated after last month's tsunami and earthquake wrecked the nuclear plant's power and cooling systems.

Under a special nuclear emergency law, people who enter the zone will now be subject to fines of up to ¥100,000 and possible detention of up to 30 days. Up to now, defiance of the evacuation order was not punishable by law.

"We beg the understanding of residents. We really want residents not to enter the areas," Edano said. "Unfortunately, there are still some people in the areas."

The new ruling was not due to any particular change in conditions inside the plant, which appears to have somewhat stabilized. Even under the best-case scenario, however, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said it will take at least six months to bring its reactors safely into a cold shutdown.

Almost all the zone's nearly 80,000 residents left when the area was evacuated March 12, but police had not been able to legally block them from going back.

Police contacted Thursday said they had no estimate of the exact number of people who have returned to the zone or who still might be living there.

Officials said the order was meant to limit exposure to radiation leaking from the plant, and to control entry to prevent theft.

Edano said authorities would arrange brief visits for residents, allowing one person per household to return by bus for a maximum of two hours to collect necessary belongings.

Residents would be required to go through radiation screening, he said.

But visits will not be allowed in the 3 km area closest to the plant, said Hidehiko Nishiyama of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, confirming reports that the zone would be completely off-limits.

Details were still being worked out.

"We realize this is extremely inconvenient for residents, but we urge you to be patient," Edano told reporters in Tokyo.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan was visiting the region Thursday to meet with local officials and evacuees to discuss the plans for strict enforcement of the evacuation zone.

Kan also visited a nuclear crisis management center in Fukushima, giving a pep talk to workers there.

The prime minister has been under fire from the opposition for the government's tardy response to the ongoing nuclear crisis.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato, who has also expressed frustration with the crisis, said he strongly urged Kan to ensure the government properly handles the disaster and related compensation issues.

"I told the prime minister that I strongly hope that evacuees can return home as early as possible," Sato said.

AP

JT, Friday, April 22, 2011

No. 2 plant evac zone cut

The evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant will be made smaller as the possibility of "a serious accident" has diminished, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said Thursday.

The zone will be reduced to an 8-km radius from the plant, compared with the current 10 km, Edano said at a news conference.

The chief Cabinet secretary said that the risk of a "serious accident has become fairly small," compared with last month, as reactors of the plant, near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, are in cold shutdown.

Edano's remarks came after the government decided to ban residents from staying within the 20-km radius of the radiation-leaking No. 1 plant, ravaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

The 10-km evacuation zone set for residents around the No. 2 plant in the Hamadori area on the Pacific Coast of Fukushima Prefecture had overlapped with the 20-km ring.

With the latest change, the town of Hirono will no longer be part of the official evacuation district.

Kyodo

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* <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110422a1.html>