

No evacuation plans for 4.42 million residents near nuclear plants

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Even after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, almost all local governments in Hokkaido and 20 other prefectures are without comprehensive evacuation measures for a total of about 4.42 million residents within 30 kilometers of nuclear power plants, according to a tally by the Mainichi Shimbun.

Some of the municipalities are beset with potential traffic congestion and other problems and question if such evacuation programs are feasible in the first place. The Mainichi tally comes as the central government is trying to restart idled nuclear reactors despite the absence of sufficient evacuation measures across the densely populated country.

In the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, in March this year an expert panel of the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan drew up a midterm report in which the government had decided to expand emergency planning zones (EPZs) within a radius of 8 to 10 kilometers of nuclear power plants to the 30-kilometer radius urgent protection action planning zone (UPZ).

A proposed nuclear regulatory agency will formally designate such zones and carry out simulations.

According to Kenji Tani, an associate professor of human geography at Saitama University, the combined population within 30 kilometers of 54 nuclear reactors, including four now-defunct nuclear reactors at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant, comes to about 4.42 million, based on the 2005 census. About 930,000 people live within 30 kilometers of the Tokai No. 2 Power Station owned by the Japan Atomic Power Co. in Ibaraki Prefecture.

The *Mainichi* contacted Hokkaido, Kyoto, Nagasaki and 18 other prefectures which host nuclear power plants or some of whose municipalities are located within a 30-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants.

Only Hokkaido says it has an evacuation plan to transport 75,000 residents near the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant in a fleet of 1,500 buses. Excluding Gifu Prefecture, which has no population in the 30-kilometer zone, the 19 other prefectures say they are contemplating evacuation measures or will study such steps. Ibaraki Prefecture says it is “very difficult” to map out evacuation measures.

Many of the prefectures in the Mainichi survey are projecting evacuations by car. Due to a small number of roads and bridges in these regions, areas with sizable populations and limited evacuation routes may face heavy traffic congestion and leave evacuees stranded.

Only Saga and Nagasaki prefectures have secured possible evacuation centers for residents within 30 kilometers of the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant belonging to Kyushu Electric Power Co. and assigned them by area to such places as schools and community halls outside the 30-kilometer zone. Both prefectures consider private vehicles as an emergency means of transportation in principle but will study in the future how they are going to evacuate residents without cars.

The survey also revealed that most prefectures have yet to consider or implement steps to evacuate

inpatients and elderly people in need of nursing care. Only Fukuoka Prefecture, where a portion of its western edge falls within the 30-kilometer zone, says it can accommodate inpatients at designated hospitals in case of disaster.

Nagasaki Prefecture says it is difficult for them to find hospitals with empty beds. Shimane Prefecture says it is necessary to evacuate residents in cooperation with municipalities across prefectural borders but that there is a limit to what local governments alone can do to coordinate evacuation plans.

P.S.

* Mainichi Shimbun, April 23, 2012:

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120423p2a00m0na011000c.html>