

Japan: 18% of Fukushima evacuees might be unable to go home even after 10 yrs

Friday 22 June 2012, by [Kyodo News](#) (Date first published: 29 May 2012).

70 percent of residents near Fukushima nuke plant forced to evacuate at least 4 times after disaster

Mainichi Shimbun, June 11, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120611p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Some 70 percent of residents in six municipalities surrounding the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant were forced to evacuate at least four times after the nuclear disaster, a survey by the Diet's committee investigating the disaster has shown.

The Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) released the results of the survey covering some 10,000 affected households on June 9. The survey found that 70 percent of residents in Namie, Futaba and four other Fukushima Prefecture towns near the crippled nuclear power plant had to evacuate four times or more during the first year after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011, while half of the residents of Namie were temporarily evacuated to areas with high levels of radiation.

"The government's evacuation instructions were haphazard and invited confusion," said NAIIC Chairman Kiyoshi Kurokawa.

The questionnaire, conducted in March and April this year, was sent to some 21,000 households that were randomly selected from the approximately 55,000 households in 12 municipalities that were subject to the government's evacuation instructions, of which 10,633 households responded. It is the first time that a fact-finding survey on such large-scale evacuations affecting more than 10,000 households has been carried out, according to the investigation committee.

According to the survey, 32 percent of residents in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie were forced to evacuate six times or more during the year after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, while 29 percent of residents in Futaba and more than 20 percent of residents in Okuma, Naraha, Tomioka and Hirono in the prefecture, respectively, did the same.

Furthermore, the survey found that 50 percent of residents in Namie evacuated to areas where radiation doses were high without knowing it, while some 30 percent of residents in Futaba and Tomioka, respectively, responded the same.

In an open-response question, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the government for not swiftly releasing such critical information as that on radiation doses, and causing confusion as a result.

"For the rest of my life, my health will be threatened by the fact that I was evacuated to a highly radioactive area. Why did the government withhold the information?" said one resident from Namie.

It has also been found that the government failed to provide residents with sufficient information on the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. The government declared a state of emergency at 7:03 p.m. on March 11, 2011, saying that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant had plunged into a serious situation after losing its cooling capability, and issued evacuation instructions to residents within a three-kilometer radius from the nuclear plant at 9:23 p.m. the same day. However, more than 80 percent of the respondents had been unaware of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster even after the evacuation instructions had been issued, according to the survey.

"I didn't know a hydrogen explosion had occurred (at the nuclear plant) and was wondering why we had to evacuate. In any case, information was slow," said a resident in the Odaka district of Minamisoma.

A resident of Okuma criticized the government for failing to dispatch sufficient information promptly, saying, "If the government had mentioned the nuclear plant when it issued the evacuation instructions, I could have locked up my house and brought out my valuables. I'm disappointed that my house was robbed (while I was evacuated)."

Asked the source from which they learned of the nuclear disaster, 40 percent of residents in Futaba and Naraha said they got the information from their local governments, while only 10 percent of residents from Kawamata, Iitate and Minamisoma — which are farther away from the nuclear plant — responded the same. Half of respondents in the latter group said they learned about the disaster via TV, radio or the Internet.

As for evacuation drills envisaging a nuclear accident, 16 percent of residents in Futaba said they had undergone such drills prior to the disaster, while only about 10 percent of residents in other municipalities hosting nuclear plants responded the same. Less than 10 percent of residents in all municipalities surveyed had received information on the possibility of accidents at nuclear plants, according to the survey.

18% of Fukushima evacuees might be unable to go home even after 10 yrs

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Nearly 20 percent of evacuees might not be able to return to their homes in evacuation areas near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant even 10 years after the disaster, according to an estimate the government made available Saturday.

According to the estimate, 18% of the residents in 11 municipalities in the government-set evacuation zones may have difficulties returning to their homes on the assumption that effects of ongoing work to get rid of radioactive materials in the communities are not taken into consideration.

In the towns of Okuma where part of the nuclear plant stands, for example, 81 percent of the residents may have difficulties returning home and the figure came to 49 percent for the town of Futaba, which hosts the remaining part of the plant.

The government made the estimate available during a meeting with local governments in Fukushima Prefecture, including the 11 municipalities, as part of a plan of rehabilitation from the March 2011 nuclear accident triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami.

Kyodo Press, June 10, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120610p2g00m0dm004000c.html>

TEPCO eyes trial removal of unused fuel from Fukushima No. 4 fuel pool

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Tokyo Electric Power Co. is considering removing two unused nuclear fuel assemblies stored in the spent fuel pool of the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi power plant's No. 4 reactor unit around July, officials said Sunday.

The operation would serve as a trial for the removal of a huge amount of fuel left in the pool, a key priority in dealing with the plant because the upper part of the building housing the reactor and the pool was blown off by a hydrogen explosion in the early days of last year's nuclear crisis.

As unused fuel is not generating heat from nuclear fission, it is less dangerous to handle than spent fuel. The utility known as TEPCO is hoping to determine the extent of damage to the unused fuel assemblies and ways to store them.

At the time the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, triggering the nuclear crisis, the No. 4 reactor's fuel was in the spent fuel pool due to maintenance work. The pool contains 1,535 fuel assemblies, including 204 unused ones.

TEPCO plans to start removing the fuel in the pool by the end of 2013 as part of the process to decommission the plant's Nos. 1 to 4 reactors that were severely affected by the disaster.

While concerns remain that the pool is in a vulnerable state, TEPCO said in its latest inspection that it has confirmed that it is not tilting and is capable of safely storing the nuclear fuel inside.

Kyodo Press, May 28, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120528p2g00m0dm006000c.html>

Radioactive cesium from Fukushima found in tuna caught off U.S.

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Trace amounts of radioactive cesium released from Japan's crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have been found in bluefin tuna caught off the western coast of the United States, according to a study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

While the amounts are not considered a health hazard, the detection reflects the magnitude of the nuclear disaster, which resulted in the release of massive amounts of radioactive materials into the atmosphere and sea.

A Stanford University researcher and two others wrote that they have found "unequivocal evidence" that the tuna transported across the Pacific Ocean radioactive cesium released in the disaster triggered by the powerful earthquake and tsunami in March last year.

According to the study published Monday, cesium 134 and cesium 137 found in 15 bluefin tuna caught off the coast of San Diego, California, last August measured 4 bequerels per kilogram and 6.3 bequerels per kg, respectively.

The tuna are believed to have been off the Japanese coast when the disaster occurred and migrated to the U.S. coast due to ocean currents.

In comparison, no cesium 134 was found in tuna caught in 2008, while a tiny amount of cesium 137 that would naturally exist in the environment was found in them. Cesium 134 has a relatively short half-life of two years.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said in a news conference, "The issue of overseas monitoring of fishery products may come up," indicating the need to assess the impact in waters beyond Japan.

Fujimura said the government will "first gather information" and decide how to deal with the matter hereafter.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the power plant in Fukushima Prefecture on the Pacific coast, estimates that 900,000 terabequerels of radioactive materials were released into the atmosphere, 18,000 terabequerels of which are believed to have flowed into the ocean. A terabequerel is equal to 1 trillion bequerels.

Kyodo Press, May 29, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120529p2g00m0dm083000c.html>

TEPCO puts radiation release early in Fukushima crisis at 900,000 TBq

TOKYO (Kyodo) — An estimated 900,000 terabecquerels of radioactive substances were released into the atmosphere in March last year alone due to the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Thursday.

The figure is around 1.8 times higher than the latest estimate issued by the government's nuclear safety agency but far lower than the 5.2 million TBq believed to have been discharged in the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Japan has already acknowledged that the severity level of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima plant, triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, is maximum 7 on an international scale — equivalent to the Chernobyl disaster — based on the amount of radioactive materials released into the atmosphere.

The utility known as TEPCO said it studied the amount of radioactive substances released between March 12 and March 31, 2011, noting that the release during the following months was less than 1 percent of that in March.

It also said around 18,000 TBq of radioactive substances ended up flowing into the adjacent Pacific Ocean in the form of fallout or by getting mixed with water that leaked from the plant between March and September.

The Fukushima plant's Nos. 1 to 3 reactors suffered meltdowns after the six-reactor complex lost nearly all of its power sources and consequently the ability to cool the reactors and spent fuel pools after it was hit by huge tsunami waves.

Hydrogen explosions occurred at the Nos. 1, 3 and 4 units in the early days of the nuclear crisis, blowing off the walls and roofs of the buildings housing the reactors.

TEPCO said that 4,600 TBq of radioactive substances were emitted when an explosion occurred at the No. 1 reactor building on March 12, and 1,060 TBq when an explosion occurred at the No. 3 reactor on March 14.

It could not measure the amount released when an explosion occurred at the No. 4 unit on March 15, where all of the reactor's nuclear fuel was stored in the spent fuel pool.

The release peaked on March 15 and 16, possibly because the primary containment vessels of the Nos. 1 to 3 reactors degraded due to high temperatures and massive radioactive substances were released from the upper part of the containers together with steam.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency has estimated that the radioactive release was 480,000 TBq, and another oversight body, the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, estimated that it was 570,000 TBq.

TEPCO said that the differences in the figures could be attributed to calculation methods and further assessment is needed.

Kyodo Press, May 25, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120525p2a00m0na050000c.html>

Edano sensed TEPCO intended complete pullout from Fukushima plant

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said Sunday that it was “clear” that Tokyo Electric Power Co. sought to withdraw all its workers from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant at one point in the early days of the crisis last year, contradicting the utility's claim that it had no such intention.

Testifying to a Diet-appointed panel investigating the nuclear disaster, Edano, then chief Cabinet secretary, said he remembered Tokyo Electric President Masataka Shimizu “stammer” when he asked him over the phone whether the situation might get out of control if all staff were withdrawn from the plant.

“I do not remember the exchanges of words accurately...But it was clear that the company did not intend to leave some (of the workers),” Edano said at the panel's hearing, which was open to the public.

The utility known as TEPCO has denied it had any intention of withdrawing all of the workers from the plant and has insisted it was trying to remove some staff not directly involved in handling the nuclear crisis.

Kyodo Press, May 27, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120527p2g00m0dm066000c.html>

