

Document suggests government estimated 1,600 workers exposed to radiation

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The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry estimated that approximately 1,600 workers partaking in efforts to rein in the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will be exposed to over 50 millisieverts of radiation, according to a document that emerged July 26 after a citizens' group lodged a request for access to government information.

The internal ministry document was released to the public domain in June after the Japan Occupational Safety and Health Resource Center (JOSHRC) requested the public disclosure of government information. The document originating from the ministry said: "Those who in the days ahead will be exposed to over 50 millisieverts of radiation are expected to number around 1,600."

Based on this estimate, the document, created on April 25, expressed concerns that "it will be difficult to secure the safety of other nuclear power plants unless those who have been exposed to more than 50 millisieverts of radiation continue to engage in radiation work." The document also noted that workers should be instructed not to be exposed to over 100 millisieverts of radiation in a five-year period.

The law stipulates that the maximum level of radiation exposure that radiation workers are permitted per year in normal times is 50 millisieverts. According to the operator of the stricken power plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), as of July 13, six company employees had been exposed to over 250 millisieverts of radiation — the amount permitted for workers in emergency situations. Meanwhile, a total of 416 workers from both TEPCO and subcontractors working at the plant have been exposed to more than 50 millisieverts.

A representative for the ministry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) says that the agency has yet to confirm revelations concerning the document, including whether or not the ministry actually ran calculations to come up with an estimate.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/27/20110727p2a00m0na016000c.html>