

Japon: Anti-Nuke Daily Fights...

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Fukushima residents dissatisfied with prefectural handling of thyroid cancer screenings

FUKUSHIMA — The prefectural government's lack of transparency concerning its thyroid cancer screening process has left residents frustrated and scrambling to protect their children.

Last fall, Makiko Suzuki, 39, from the prefectural city of Nihonmatsu, accompanied her 6-year-old son to a thyroid exam conducted by the prefecture. The technician who carried out the test appeared to be measuring something on the ultrasound monitor, but the exam ended after just a couple of minutes, without Suzuki receiving any kind of explanation.

Concerned, Suzuki took her son to a hospital to be screened again. In the 10-minute exam, the boy was found to have a nodule seven millimeters in size, which would merit a "B" grade under prefectural guidelines and require him to receive a second exam. However, the report Suzuki received from the prefecture about a month later ranked her son in the "A2" category, which only requires that his condition be monitored.

Suzuki demanded the release of her son's ultrasound images and exam report from the prefecture. The report she received about three weeks later said that her son had a 1.6-millimeter cyst, but no nodules.

"The prefectural exams don't look at the children carefully," Suzuki says. "I don't believe the authorities are really respectful of how parents feel."

As it turns out, in the prefectural exams, four out of the 12 items that are usually checked for in a general thyroid exam are omitted — a fact the prefecture, however, had not previously revealed to the public.

A thyroid ultrasound guidebook edited by the Japan Association of Breast and Thyroid Sonology lists

12 items including thyroid shape and thyroid size that should be looked at in a thyroid exam. In information sessions held for local residents, the Fukushima Medical University, which conducts the prefecture's thyroid exams, cited the guidebook and emphasized that its screening process was highly precise.

In reality, however, the exams skip four check items, such as internal changes in the thyroid and state of blood circulation. Professor Shinichi Suzuki, who serves as supervisor of the exams, explains the decision, saying, "We determined that it wouldn't be necessary to look into the other items in such a short, first exam. We don't look at (internal changes in the thyroid or blood circulation) across the board, but we do when we deem it necessary."

Around 360,000 young people were 18 or under at the time the nuclear disaster broke out, and are subject to the prefecture's thyroid exams. Suzuki says the exams were abbreviated to speed up the screening process.

Meanwhile, Masamichi Nishio, a radiologist and honorary director of the Hokkaido Cancer Center, says the process is insufficient in picking up subtle abnormalities.

"A test cannot be called very precise unless you look at blood circulation. Without doing so, it's difficult to differentiate between a small cyst and a blood vessel. The prefectural exam is a simple one that only checks for serious conditions."

There have been three confirmed and seven suspected cases of thyroid cancer among children in the prefecture tested in fiscal 2011, and at Fukushima Medical University's information sessions, many residents called for radiation exposure estimates. Suzuki for a long time refused to release the information, saying it would invade subjects' privacy, and repeatedly stated that exposure levels were low and that a causal relationship between radiation exposure and the cancer cases was unlikely.

Some residents viewed prefectural authorities as operating on the premise that radiation exposure has had no impact. At an information session held in the prefectural city of Aizuwakamatsu in March, a mother stood up and said, "You say you will 'relieve parents' concerns.' But what we want is not for you to eliminate our concerns, but the truth. We'll draw our own conclusions."

When results of the thyroid exams were released to an NPO under a prefectural information disclosure ordinance, the data was also delivered to municipalities. However, because the municipal governments received data only of their own residents, they voiced dissatisfaction, saying it did not allow them to compare results across municipalities.

Amid such circumstances, municipal governments and civic groups are increasingly moving toward conducting their own thyroid screenings; the city of Motomiya and the town of Namie have already begun. NPO Iwaki Radio-Proof Center began exams on March 17 with cutting-edge equipment that had been donated, and those who are screened receive printed out ultrasound images on the spot.

* *Mainichi Shimbun*, April 27,
2013<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130427p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Anti-reactor restart mayors victorious in Shizuoka elections

SHIZUOKA — Municipal elections delivered wins on April 21 for two incumbent mayors against the restart of the nearby Hamaoka Nuclear Power Station, joining two other cities in the region against reactivating the plant's reactors.

Mayoral elections were held in the cities of Iwata, Kakegawa and Fukuroi, and anti-restart incumbents in the latter two were returned to office. The mayors of nearby cities Kikugawa and Yaizu have also declared they "will not recognize" any move by plant operator Chubu Electric Power Co. to restart the Hamaoka reactors.

All five cities fall in whole or in part under the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA)-designated 30-kilometer radius "urgent protective action planning zone" (UPZ) around the plant, where preparations must be made to shelter the local population in case of a nuclear accident.

The Hamaoka area is one projected epicenter for the next major earthquake in the Tokai region.

The NRA expanded the UPZ across the country from 8-10 kilometers to 30 kilometers in October last year. In the case of the Hamaoka nuclear plant, the new UPZ embraced parts of 11 cities and towns. Two of those cities also fall within the plant's five-kilometer "precautionary action zone" (PAZ), where urgent emergency measures must be prepared.

Municipal government approval is not strictly required to restart a nuclear reactor. Gaining local cooperation is considered essential, however, due to the burden placed on the municipalities by a nearby nuclear station, including preparing sufficient stores of iodine tablets and drawing up evacuation plans.

In the Kakegawa election battle between current and previous mayors, 66-year-old incumbent Saburo Matsui hammered home the message that "it's very hard to say that this is really the place for a nuclear plant," and, "I will not recognize a restart until the safety of the plant has been confirmed." His 73-year-old opponent and former mayor Shinya Totsuka, meanwhile, said he "would not entirely repudiate the nuclear plant" and said he would approve a restart if certain conditions were met.

In the Fukuroi poll, both incumbent Hideyuki Harada and his opponent came out against restarting Hamaoka's reactors.

"Even when the new safety measures (at the plant) are completed, I still will not approve reactor restarts," the winning Harada said.

Hamaoka reactor restarts were not an issue in the Iwata mayoral election.

Part of Kakegawa is within 10 kilometers of the Hamaoka plant, and had signed an agreement with Chubu Electric on safety measures even before the UPZ expansion. Fukuroi is not within 10 kilometers of the power station, but the city is demanding Chubu Electric sign an equivalent accord.

A Chubu Electric executive told the Mainichi that the firm would "refrain from commenting on the election results, but is developing thorough safety measures that we hope will lead to local public approval for reactor restarts."

The power company is set to finish construction on anti-tsunami projects within the year, and will install the newly-required filtered vents at the Hamaoka plant's No. 3 and 4 reactors by March 2015.

Chubu Electric is aiming to restart the reactors soon after.

Mainichi Shimbun, April 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130422p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Lawsuit seeks evacuation of Fukushima children

TOKYO (AP) — Their demand: The right to live free of radiation. The plaintiffs who started the legal battle: 14 children.

A Japanese appeals court is expected to rule soon on this unusual lawsuit, filed on behalf of the children by their parents and anti-nuclear activists in June 2011 in a district court in Fukushima city, about 60 kilometers (40 miles) west of the crippled nuclear plant that spewed radiation when a massive earthquake and tsunami hit it more than two years ago.

The lawsuit argues that Koriyama, a city of 330,000, should evacuate its children to an area where radiation levels are no higher than natural background levels in the rest of Japan, or about 1 millisievert annual exposure.

In a culture that frowns upon challenging the authorities, the lawsuit highlights the rift in public opinion created by the baffling range in experts' views on the health impact of low dose radiation. Although some experts say there is no need for children to be evacuated, parents are worried about the long-term impact on their children, who are more vulnerable to radiation than adults. Consuming contaminated food and water are additional risks.

After the Fukushima accident, the world's worst since Chernobyl, Japan set an annual exposure limit of 20 millisieverts for determining whether people can live in an area or not. The average radiation for Koriyama is far below this cutoff point, but some "hot spots" around the city are above that level.

"This is the level at which there are no major effects on health and people can live there," said Keita Kawamori, an official with the Japanese Cabinet Office. "Academic experts decided this was the safe level."

A prominent medical doctor in charge of health safety in Fukushima has repeatedly urged calm, noting damage is measurable only at annual exposure of 100 millisieverts, or 100 times the normal level, and higher.

A lower court rejected the lawsuit's demands in a December 2011 decision, saying radiation had not reached the 100-millisievert cutoff. The International Commission on Radiological Protection, the academic organization on health and radiation, says risks decline with a drop exposure, but does not believe there is a cutoff below which there is no risk.

An appeal filed is still before Sendai High Court in nearby Miyagi Prefecture more than a year later.

After the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which emitted more radiation than the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, the Soviet government made it a priority to evacuate women and children from within a 30-kilometer (20-mile) radius of the plant, bigger than the 20-kilometer (12-mile) no-go zone around the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant.

The number of children behind the original lawsuit dwindled to 10 for the appeal, and is now down to one as families left the prefecture voluntarily or the children grew older. Legally in Japan, a city has responsibility for children only through junior high, since high school is not compulsory.

But the case serves as a precedent for other Fukushima children.

Toshio Yanagihara, one of the lawyers, criticized the government as appearing more worried about a population exodus than in saving the children.

“I don’t understand why an economic power like Japan won’t evacuate the children — something even the fascist government did during World War II,” he said, referring to the mass evacuation of children during the 1940s to avoid air bombings. “This is child abuse.”

After Chernobyl, thousands of children got thyroid cancer. Some medical experts say leukemia, heart failure and other diseases that followed may be linked to radiation.

In Fukushima, at least three cases of thyroid cancer have been diagnosed among children, although there’s no evidence of a link with the nuclear disaster. There are no comparative figures on thyroid cancer in other areas of Japan.

The children in the lawsuit and their families are all anonymous, and details about them are not disclosed, to protect them from possible backlash of ostracism and bullying.

“Why is Japan, our Fukushima, about to repeat the mistakes of Chernobyl?” wrote a mother of one of the children in a statement submitted to the court. “Isn’t it up to us adults to protect our children?”

The trial has attracted scant attention in the mainstream Japanese media but it has drawn support from anti-nuclear protesters, who have periodically held massive rallies.

Among the high-profile supporters are musician Ryuichi Sakamoto, manga artist Tetsuya Chiba and American linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky.

“There is no better measure of the moral health of a society than how it treats the most vulnerable people within it, and none or more vulnerable, or more precious, than children who are the victims of unconscionable actions,” Chomsky wrote in a message.

A 12-year-old, among those who filed the lawsuit but have since left the area, said she was worried.

“Even if I am careful, I may get cancer, and the baby I have may be hurt,” she said in a hand-written statement.

AP, April 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130414p2g00m0dm016000c.html>

Court turns down suit seeking suspension of Oi nuclear plant reactors

OSAKA (Kyodo) — The Osaka District Court on Tuesday turned down a suit seeking to suspend the operation of two reactors at the Oi power plant run by Kansai Electric Power Co. in Fukui Prefecture

on the Sea of Japan coast.

The court rejected the lawsuit filed by a group of some 260 residents in western Japan seeking suspension of the two reactors which were re-launched in July 2012.

The plaintiffs are residents in eight prefectures of Osaka, Kyoto, Fukui, Gifu, Shiga, Nara, Wakayama and Hyogo who are worried about the possible outbreak of a severe nuclear disaster at the plant in the event of a major earthquake.

Presiding Judge Kenichi Ono said in the ruling that the two reactors satisfy safety standards that are deemed reasonable.

It was the first judicial decision on the operation of reactors other than the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, since the March 2011 outbreak of the nuclear disaster at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant in northeastern Japan.

The No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the four-reactor Oi plant are the only ones currently in operation among the country's 50 reactors.

The plaintiffs filed the suit with the Osaka court in March 2012, seeking a court order to halt the re-launch of the two reactors. The two reactors went into operation four months later in July that year, as the government allowed Kansai Electric to re-launch the reactors.

In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs argued that the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant clearly showed that the government's safety standards for reactors were wrong.

They also insisted that there were three active faults near the Oi power plant and that a major temblor caused by those faults could lead to a serious nuclear disaster.

In response, Kansai Electric argued that it had taken additional safety measures in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, adding that anti-earthquake measures were secured at the Oi plant.

In June 2012, the residents filed a separate lawsuit against the government seeking a government order to suspend the operation of the two reactors at the Oi power plant.

Kyodo News, April 16, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130416p2g00m0dm079000c.html>

7,000 flock to rally for decommissioning of all reactors in Fukushima

FUKUSHIMA — Some 7,000 people joined an anti-nuclear power rally here over the weekend, calling for the abolishment of all nuclear reactors in this disaster-hit prefecture, organizers have announced.

The rally, titled "Genpatsu no nai Fukushima o! Kenmin daishukai" (For a Fukushima without nuclear plants! Mass meeting for prefectural residents), was held in a gymnasium at this city's Azuma Sports Park on March 23.

Rally participants from in and outside the prefecture offered a silent prayer for the victims of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as those who died during the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster evacuation. The rally adopted a declaration calling on the central government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. to decommission all reactors in the prefecture.

Mainichi Shimbun, March 25, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na009000c.html>

First anniversary of weekly antinuclear rallies outside prime minister's office marked

The first anniversary was marked Friday of the weekly antinuclear demonstrations in front of the prime minister's office that have grown steadily partly via the popularity of social media.

At the latest rally, the 48th organized by the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, demonstrators chanted "Get rid of nuclear power plants" and "Don't restart them."

According to the organizer, people have taken to the streets in Tokyo's Nagata-cho political district every Friday from 6 p.m. since March 29, 2012, to call for the elimination of nuclear power in light of the Fukushima atomic plant crisis that started on March 11, 2011.

The demonstrations originally attracted around 300 people but grew drastically as word spread through social media networks, including Twitter and Facebook.

Within three months, the weekly rallies started to draw more than 100,000 participants as the then-ruling Democratic Party of Japan moved to restart two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Since late last year, several thousand people have been turning out for the rallies.

Misao Redwolf, who played a key role in organizing the rallies, said, "It is very unpleasant to mark the first anniversary, but we have to do it (the rally) as not all reactors have stopped operation yet." "We believe it is important to continue providing a space where anyone can join in" to protest, she said, adding that antinuclear demonstrations have been held in many places across Japan at the same time each week.

Makio Tahara, 65, who attended the rally with his 10-year-old grandchild, said, "It is hard to achieve a withdrawal from nuclear power acting as an individual, but whether it is effective or not, it is important to express our feelings."

Kyodo News, Mar 30, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/30/national/first-anniversary-of-weekly-antinuclear-rallies-outside-prime-ministers-office-marked/#.UWNdPPJUpWE>

METI wants tent city to move on

The government will soon file a suit seeking removal of tents set up on the premises of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry by activists opposed to nuclear power, METI Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Friday.

Motegi said a settlement through civil court proceedings was needed to remove the tents.

Motegi, whose ministry oversees atomic power administration, said METI has asked to activists to strike the tents but they have refused.

He said the campaigners have illegally occupied state property for a long time.

The antinuclear activists set up the tents in September 2011, half a year after the start of the triple meltdown calamity at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant following the March 11, 2011, megaquake-tsunami disaster.

The tents are seen as a symbol of the activists seeking to end Japan's reliance on nuclear power.

One of the leaders of the tent movement, Taro Fuchigami, 70, said his group would consult with lawyers to deal with the government's legal action, adding there is nothing illegal about the tents.

Kyodo, March 16, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/16/national/meti-wants-tent-city-to-move-on/#.UU-1YjfA55s>

U.S. military personnel suing Tepco

WASHINGTON — U.S. service members are suing Tokyo Electric Power Co. for more than \$2 billion (\$190 billion), alleging the utility lied about the dangers of helping to clean up after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, a U.S. military newspaper reported.

The case was initially filed by nine American military personnel in December but the number of plaintiffs has since expanded to 26 and another 100 are in the process of joining the suit, the Stars and Stripes paper said Thursday.

The new complaint was filed Tuesday in a U.S. District Court in California, a day after the second anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the Fukushima crisis.

The plaintiffs include active duty and retired shore-based marines, their dependents and sailors from U.S. naval vessels that operated in the disaster area. They claim to have suffered a number of ailments linked to their exposure, including cancer, thyroid problems, and rectal and gynecological

bleeding.

The newspaper reported that peers of the plaintiffs complain they are seeking an easy payoff and that the Pentagon insists the radiation they were exposed to did not pose a major health risk.

AFP-Jiji Press, March 17, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/17/national/u-s-military-personnel-suing-tepco/#.UU-7aTfA55s>

Protesters in Tokyo demand end to nuclear power

TOKYO - Thousands of people rallied in a Tokyo park Saturday, demanding an end to atomic power and vowing never to give up the fight, despite two years of little change after the nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan.

Gathering two days ahead of the second anniversary of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that sent the Fukushima Daiichi plant into multiple meltdowns, demonstrators said they would never forget the nuclear catastrophe, and expressed alarm over the government's eagerness to restart reactors.

"I can't see what lies ahead. It looks hopeless, but if I give up now, it's over," said Akihiro Nakata, a 47-year-old owner of a construction company, who had a drum slung around his shoulder. "I'd rather die moving forward."

Only two of Japan's 50 working nuclear reactors have been put back online since the disaster, partly because of continuous protests like Saturday's, the first time such demonstrations have popped up in this nation since the 1960s movement against the Vietnam War.

People have thronged Tokyo parks on national holidays, and have gathered outside the parliament building every Friday evening. The demonstrations have drawn people previously unseen at political rallies, such as commuter "salarymen" and housewives. Organizers said Saturday's demonstration drew 13,000 people.

Two years after the disaster, 160,000 people have left their homes around the plant, entire sections of nearby communities are still ghost towns, and fears grow about cancer and other sicknesses the spewing radiation might bring.

But the new prime minister elected late last year, Shinzo Abe, hailing from a conservative party that fostered the pro-nuclear policies of modernizing Japan, wants to restart the reactors, and maybe even build new ones.

The protesters said they were shocked by how the government was ignoring them.

"I am going to fight against those who act as though Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Fukushima never happened," Nobel Prize-winning writer Kenzaburo Oe told the crowd, referring to the atomic bombings preceding the end of World War II. "I am going to fight to prevent any more reactors from being restarted."

The demonstrators applauded, waving signs and lanterns that read, "Let's save the children" and "No nukes." Some were handing out leaflets, pleading to save animals abandoned in the no-go zone.

Kazuko Nihei, 36, was selling trinkets and soap that mothers, like her, who had fled Fukushima had made, hoping to raise funds for children's health check-ups and their new lives in Tokyo.

"When the government talks about recovery, they are talking about infrastructure. When we talk about recovery, we are talking about the future of our children," she said.

Another big Tokyo rally was planned for Sunday. A concert Saturday evening featured Oscar and Grammy-winning musician Ryuichi Sakamoto, one of the most vocal opponents of nuclear power. Commemorative services will be held Monday throughout the nation to remember the nearly 19,000 people who died in the disaster.

Less under the spotlight Monday will be a class-action lawsuit being filed against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co, the utility that operates Fukushima Daiichi, demanding all land, the natural environment and homes be restored to their state before March 11, 2011.

The lawsuit in Fukushima District Court is unusual in drawing people from all walks of life, including farmers, fishermen and housewives, because of the wording of the damage demand.

It has drawn 800 plaintiffs so far, a remarkable number in a conformist culture that frowns upon any challenge to the status quo, especially lawsuits. That number may grow as people join the lawsuit in coming months. A verdict is not expected for more than a year.

"We can't believe the government is thinking about restarting the reactors after the horrendous damage and human pain the accident has caused," Izutaro Managi, one of the lawyers, said by telephone. "It is tantamount to victimizing the victims one more time."

Kazuko Ishige, a 66-year-old apartment manager who was at the rally with a friend from Fukushima, said she was sick of the government's lies about the safety of nuclear plants.

"I am really angry," she said. "I am going to have to keep at it until I die."

YURI KAGEYAMA, AP, March 09, 2013

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<http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/protesters-in-tokyo-demand-end-to-nuclear-power>

Rallies Held for N-Plant Abolition 2 Years after Crisis

Tokyo, March 10 (Jiji Press)—Massive demonstrations were staged in central Tokyo on Sunday by people seeking the abolition of all nuclear power plants in Japan two years after the country's worst nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s <9501> disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Shouting, "We don't need nuclear plants" and "We oppose nuclear plant restarts," they marched around the office of the prime minister, the buildings for the science ministry and the industry ministry, and the TEPCO headquarters, all in Chiyoda Ward of the Japanese capital.

Before starting the demonstrations, participants gathered at Hibiya Park in the same ward and observed a minute of silence for people who lost their lives in the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

Misao Redwolf, an official of the Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes, which organized the demonstrations, told the participants, "We aim to have the government pledge to scrap all nuclear power plants."

Kaoru Suzuki, an official of a nonprofit organization from the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima, home to the crippled TEPCO plant, said, "I strongly feel that no step forward has been made (toward the scrapping of nuclear plants) since the day when the nuclear crisis started" on March 11, 2011.

Jiji Press, March 10, 2013

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2013031000151>

Nuclear disaster victims file suits against state, TEPCO

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Around 1,700 people filed damages suits against the state and Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Monday, the second anniversary of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that triggered multiple meltdowns at the utility's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

In the suits, filed with the Fukushima, Chiba and Tokyo district courts, the plaintiffs are demanding a combined 5.36 billion yen in damages and the restoration of the environment to its condition prior to the disaster, arguing the nuclear crisis harmed the plaintiffs' health and communities, according to their defense teams.

They also said the state was responsible for the disaster and called for the establishment of a system to meet the victims' needs.

The utility, known as TEPCO, said in a statement that it did not know the plaintiffs' demands in the suits because it had not received the complaints.

The plaintiffs were living in Fukushima, Miyagi, Yamagata, Tochigi and Ibaraki prefectures at the time of the nuclear disaster. Some of them have evacuated to Niigata, Aichi and Okinawa and other prefectures.

In Fukushima, around 200 of the plaintiffs marched into the district court to submit their complaint.

In Chiba, Kimiko Fukutake, chief of her defense team, said, "Japan's nuclear power project has been led by the central government, so it is natural that we are seeking compensation from the state and TEPCO."

Kyodo News, March 12, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130312p2g00m0dm027000c.html>

