

Extremely High Radiation Levels in Japan: University Researchers Challenge Official Data

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An independent assessment by university researchers from Kyoto University and Hiroshima University finds that the radiation levels are not being correctly reported by the Japanese government nor TEPCO.

Anti-nuclear protesters holding placards shout slogans as they march in Tokyo April 10, 2011. The placard read, "No Need Nuclear Power Plant" and "Change Energy Policies". Japan is struggling to regain control of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant after a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated its northeast on March 11, and is facing a major humanitarian and economic crisis.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster is often touted as being of less concern than the Chernobyl disaster. We are reserving judgement on that, but generally feel the situation is far worse. We base this on facts, not opinion. This latest article only increases our awareness of how much has been hidden from us, and how the officials are spinning the story. Of great concern are their findings that outside of the recommended 30 kilometer zone, extremely high radiation has been detected. They are 400 times normal radiation levels and exceed what normal evacuation procedures would consider dangerous.

Protesters hold placards against nuclear power plant as they took to the streets in a rally against nuclear power and its development, in Tokyo, on Sunday, April 10, 2011, after a devastating earthquake and tsunami crippled the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex in northeastern Japan last month. The placards held by the protesters show leaders of countries of the three major nuclear power industries, from left, U.S. President Barack Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Although the American government suggested a 80 km evacuation zone after the March 11 radiation leak, the Japanese only mandated a 20 km zone, with a recommendation that people leave within the 30 km zone. Yesterday was Sunday in Japan, and the American government downgraded their recommendation to 40km. This is quite remarkable considering that high levels were known to be occurring at Iitate village, which is outside the 30km evacuation zone, and given this latest disclosure from the Asahi news agency.

A worker wearing protective suit points at his rubber boots to show the level of water being submerged at the second basement floor of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima prefecture, northern Japan in this handout photo taken April 8, 2011, and released by Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. Japan will pump radioactive water into the sea from the crippled nuclear plant until Sunday, a day later than previously planned, its nuclear safety agency said. Picture taken April 8, 2011. Mandatory Credit.

Radiation was detected in ranges from “590,000 to 2.19 million becquerels/cubic meter outside the 30km range.” These numbers far exceed the levels at Chernobyl which ranged below 550,000 becquerels/cubic meter. Of most concern is that both measurements were of the same radioactive isotope: Cesium-137, which has a half-life of 30 years. To this day, wide areas of the area surrounding Chernobyl are ghost towns. No humans can live there without causing extremely strong health affects and birth defects. Numerous documentaries have been made concerning children born with deformities and mentally incapacitated during this period, and people who suffered from the effects of the Cesium poisoning.

The Japanese government is considering revising their radiation limits on agricultural products, fishing, water, soil, and even human exposure given the increase in radiation. With no hope in sight of alleviating the tragedy, and with only the news that this will continue for months or years, we can expect further increases in radiation readings and accumulation in the food chain.

While Chernobyl was an enormous unprecedented disaster, it only occurred at one reactor and rapidly melted down. Once cooled, it was able to be covered with a concrete sarcophagus that was constructed with 100,000 workers. There are a staggering 4400 tons of nuclear fuel rods at Fukushima, which greatly dwarfs the total size of radiation sources at Chernobyl. The Daiichi plant has a total of six reactors. As yet there are no plans to concrete the structures since they are not cool yet, nor has TEPCO announced plans to do so. One can imagine the enormous manpower needed to construct and support six concrete sarcophagi: 600,000 workers? I doubt the Fukushima 50 can do it alone. It should be noted that today the government revised worker exposure from 100 milliSeverts to 250 milliSieverts. Outside contractors working on the facility refused the higher standard.

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