

Fukushima's Owner Adds Insult to Injury - Claims Radioactive Fallout Isn't Theirs

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In the amoral milieu of the corporate bottom line, you can't blame Tokyo Electric Power Co. for trying.

Tepco owns the six-reactor Fukushima complex that was wrecked by Japan's March 11 earthquake and smashed by the resulting tsunami. It faces more than \$350 billion in compensation and clean-up costs, as well as likely prosecution for withholding crucial information that may have prevented some radiation exposures and for operating the giant station after being warned about the inadequacy of its protections against disasters.

So, when the company was hauled into Tokyo District Court October 31 by the Sunfield Golf Club, which was demanding decontamination of the golf course, Tepco lawyers tried something novel. They claimed the company isn't liable because it no longer "owned" the radioactive poisons that were spewed from its destroyed reactors.

"Radioactive materials that scattered and fell from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant belong to individual landowners there, not Tepco," the company said. This stunned the court, the plaintiffs and the press. An attorney for the golf club said, "We are flabbergasted...."

The court rejected Tepco's notion that its cancer-causing pollution is owned by the areas it contaminated. But you have to hand it to Tepco. For brash balderdash, there's hardly a match in the world.

Even Union Carbide, whose toxic gas in Bhopal, India, killed 15,000 people in 1984, hasn't tried that one. Dow Chemical, which bought Union Carbide in 2001, is still fighting India's demand for \$1.7 billion in compensation. Perhaps Dow could try Tepco's dodge: "The gas belongs to the breather now, since possession is nine-tenths of the law."

Meanwhile, babies in Japan may be in for a life of debilitation and disease because radioactive cesium-137 and cesium-134 was recently found in infant milk powder. A December 6 announcement by the Meiji Holdings Company, Inc. said it was recalling 400,000 cans of its "Meiji Step," powdered milk for babies older than nine months. The powder was packaged in April - at the height of Fukushima's largest radiation releases - distributed mostly in May and has an October 2012 expiration date.

The amount of cesium in one serving of the milk powder was about 8 percent of the total contamination allowed by the government. But no one knows how much formula individual babies may have consumed prior to the recall. It is well known that fetuses, infants, children

and women are harmed by doses of radiation below officially allowed exposures. Most exposure standards have been established in view of radiation's projected effect on "Reference Man," a hypothetical 20- to 30-year-old white male, rather than women and children, the most vulnerable.

Even tiny amounts of internal radioactive contamination can damage DNA, cause cancer and weaken the immune system. Fukushima's meltdowns dispersed radioactive contamination found in vegetables, milk, seafood, water, grain, animal feed and beef. Green tea grown 250 miles from Fukushima was found contaminated. Rice harvested this fall from 154 farms in Fukushima Prefecture was found in November to be poisoned with cesium 25 percent above the allowable limit. Shipments of rice from those farms were banned, but not before many tons had been sold. Presumably, that radiation is now the property of each consumer under the inventive assertion of Tepco's corporate attorneys.

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