

Gambling with People's Lives – The Perfect Crime?

Background:

April 7 2014

Three years after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan, 357 people are being allowed to go home in a small corner of a town right on the perimeter of the original evacuation zone, 20 km away from the stricken plant. These are the first people allowed to re-populate the evacuated areas, from which almost 140,000 were displaced -- so those eligible to return home represent about 1/4 of 1 percent of those evacuated.

Massive decontamination efforts have been underway throughout a huge area stretching far beyond the original evacuation zone. See http://ccnr.org/Decontamination_Efforts.pdf . But decontamination is never 100 percent.

In this particular case, the radiation levels are deemed by the authorities to be low enough to allow rehabilitation, having been brought down to a level no greater than 20 millisieverts (mSv) per year. That level happens to represent the maximum legally allowed radiation exposure limit for an atomic worker in the EU; indeed, no atomic worker would be allowed to work at that exposure level for an entire year under ordinary circumstances.

According to the US National Academy of Sciences BEIR Committee (BEIR = Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation) if 100 people are exposed to 100 mSv, you would expect to see 1 extra cancer case caused by that radiation exposure. So if 140,000 people were returned to their homes at an exposure level of 20 mSv per year, you would expect to see 280 extra radiation-induced cancer cases in that population for every single year that the exposure continued.

It is impossible to say which individuals will get those cancers, and it is impossible to prove that any individual case of cancer was, in fact, caused by radiation. For this reason, John Gofman -- an award-winning nuclear physicist as well as an award-winning medical doctor -- described the deaths caused by such low-level radiation exposure as "the perfect crime". You know people are dying; you know what is killing them; you know who did it; but you can't prove it!

To say (as UNSCEAR has reported) that these extra deaths will be "not perceptible" simply means that statistics is too crude an instrument to reveal the truth; by the same token, you could say that any mass murderer would be responsible for an "imperceptible" number of deaths if it weren't for the bullet holes or knife wounds or eye witnesses to testify to the murders. Without a "smoking gun" to identify those who died of radiation exposure you can pretend that no one was killed.

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The situation is further complicated by the fact that the 20 mSv described above refers only to external gamma radiation, without taking into account the internal emitters -- the radioactive materials which will be ingested, or inhaled, or otherwise absorbed into the bodies of men, women and children living in these still-contaminated areas, because of radioactive contaminants in the food, water, and the residual radioactivity in the dust that is kicked up by children at play, by men working outdoors, or by women washing the family's clothes.

It is well known that embryos, babies and children are much more sensitive to the damaging effects of ionizing radiation than adults are. In fact women are also more sensitive to radiation damage than men of the same age, sometimes by up to a factor of two. Because we are not dealing with an adult male work force, but a community of folks of different genders and all ages, the predictions of radiation-induced cancer cases may be woefully underestimated.

And cancer is not the only harmful biomedical effect of protracted exposure to low-level radiation. There is a growing body of evidence that heart attacks and strokes are increased by such chronic radiation exposure, as well as damage to the reproductive cells of both men and women. Every girl is born with her ovaries intact, already containing all the eggs that she will ever have; radiation damage to these eggs at a very early age can result in genetically damaged children or grandchildren much later on in life.

The immune system is likewise compromised by radiation exposure due to the fact that some critically important white blood cells are particularly depleted by radiation exposure, thereby leaving the exposed person more susceptible to infectious diseases of all kinds.

Those people who agree to move back into contaminated areas declared "safe" by the Japanese authorities will be rewarded with a one-time payment of about \$9000. Those people who decide NOT to go back home when the authorities invite them to, will have their monthly support payments of \$1000 per month stopped.

Dealing with the consequences of a nuclear disaster is no easy matter.

Gordon Edwards.

First people allowed to return to homes in the Fukushima no-go zone

The decision, which took effect Tuesday, applies to 357 people in 117 households from a corner of Tamura city.

by: Yuri Kageyama, Associated Press, Tue April 01 2014
<http://tinyurl.com/l87bakf>



AP

Toddlers play at a nursery school in Tamura on Tuesday after authorities allowed residents to return to live in their homes within a tiny part of a 20-kilometre evacuation zone around the Fukushima plant.

TOKYO -- For the first time since Japan 's nuclear disaster three years ago, authorities are allowing residents to return to live in their homes within a tiny part of a 20-kilometre evacuation zone around the Fukushima plant.

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The decision, which took effect Tuesday, applies to 357 people in 117 households from a corner of Tamura city after the government determined that radiation levels are low enough for habitation.

But many of those evacuees are undecided about going back because of fears about radiation, especially its effect on children.

More than 100,000 people were displaced by the March 11, 2011, nuclear disaster, when a huge earthquake and ensuing tsunami damaged the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, causing meltdowns in three reactors. Many of the displaced people live in temporary housing or with relatives, and some started over elsewhere.

Areas within the evacuation zone have become ghost towns, overgrown with weeds.

Temporary visits inside the zone had previously been allowed, and about 90 people were staying with special permission, according to Tamura city hall.

New stores and public schools are planned to accommodate those who move back.

People want to go back and lead proper lives, a kind of life where they can feel their feet are on the ground, said Yutaro Aoki, a Tamura resident who works for a non-profit organization overseeing the city's recovery.

Much of Tamura lies outside the evacuation zone. The city has a population of 38,000, including evacuees living in temporary housing.

Evacuees now receive government compensation of about 100,000 yen (\$1,000) each a month. Those who move back get a one-time 900,000 yen (\$9,000) as an incentive. The monthly compensation will end within a year for residents from areas where the government decides it is safe enough to go back and live.

The radioactive plume from the Fukushima plant did not spread evenly, so some areas outside the 20-kilometre radius are unsafe. Decontamination on an unprecedented scale is ongoing in Fukushima, but some places may not be safe to live for decades.

Fukushima residents cleared to return home amid ongoing contamination fears

By Euan McKirdy, CNN News, Tue April 1, 2014

<http://tinyurl.com/m2e6rsp>

(CNN) -- Hundreds of residents of an area contaminated by a catastrophic reactor meltdown at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan have been **allowed to return home** three years after the disaster.

An evacuation order, declared in the aftermath of a devastating tsunami that crippled the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant in March, 2011, was lifted at midnight on Monday from the Miyakoji district of Tamura city in Fukushima Prefecture.

Residents of the town, who have been in limbo ever since, are now free to re-inhabit their homes following decontamination work in the area.

The Tohoku earthquake and subsequent tsunami off Japan's northeastern coast led to the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986. Three reactors melted down, with the resulting radiation fallout **forcing nearly 140,000 people from their homes**.

Around 138,000 Fukushima residents remain in temporary accommodation, with a number of cities, towns and villages reduced to ghost towns due to continued high levels of radiation.

"We are doing as much as possible (to allow) the other residents can come home. We are strengthening support towards the residents (and) strengthening the decommissioning work," a TEPCO spokesperson told CNN.

Restrictions lifted

Monday's lifting of the exclusion order is the first time an area this close to the site has been cleared. **Miyakoji is 12 miles (20 kilometers) from the plant, on the edge of the initial exclusion zone.**

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Prior to the lifting of the order, some Fukushima residents were allowed to stay overnight in their homes, subject to registration. All restrictions on their movements have now been lifted within the cleared district.

355 residents -- out of a total 116 households -- are now free to return to their homes in Miyakoji permanently. **The city of Tamura is one of eleven settlements in Fukushima that are still subject to evacuation orders.**

Radiation worries

However, **concerns remain about background radiation levels** and uncertainty surrounding the safety of the area, especially given past concerns about the **reporting of radiation levels** in the area by Fukushima's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO).

Last month, Miyakoji residents were told at a community meeting that radiation contamination levels had lowered sufficiently to enable their return to the area -- though some voiced concern over existing radiation levels despite decontamination efforts around some communities.

"Yes, I am a bit worried. But it's my land, my house, so I am feel safer and more at home here," one resident told broadcaster NHK.

Areas are declared suitable for habitation if residents are exposed to a maximum of 20 millisieverts of radiation per year. Officials have said they would like to get radiation exposure down to one millisievert a year.

The containment effort at the wrecked Fukushima plant has been beset by problems, with regular reports of leaks of contaminated material. **Earlier this year, an estimated 100 metric tons of highly contaminated water flowed over a barrier around a containment tank and is being absorbed into the ground,** TEPCO said in a statement -- though it denied there was any leakage into the nearby Pacific Ocean.