

My Thought on Fukushima after One Year

by

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Since the Fukushima nuclear accident on March 11, 2011, the Japanese government has made two attempts: (1) to have most people stay in many radioactive hometowns (except for the most highly radioactive region), and (2) to (announce a plan to) clear radioactive materials from the affected area. The first attempt is achieved by raising the evacuation standard of radiation level from 1mS/y to 20mSv/y so that people can "legally" stay in their hometowns. This 20mSv/y is 4 times higher than the 5mS/y set by the Soviet government at the time of the Chernobyl accident. The second attempt is designed to assure the people of their safety in staying in hometowns. These two attempts by the Japanese government form a logically consistent policy. But they are in sharp contradiction to the main lessons from the Chernobyl experience.

The two main lessons from the Chernobyl experience are (1) the importance of evacuating people, in particular, young children and mothers with babies from a radioactive area as soon as possible, and (2) the ineffectiveness of most attempts to clear radioactive materials from the area. In short, the Japanese government has not only failed to learn from the history, but has been doing the complete opposite of the Chernobyl lessons. It is financial and other support from the government that is necessary for the people to make the move out of their hometowns as a survey shows that the main reasons for not leaving their homes in spite of serious risks on the health of family members are money and jobs.

Therefore, instead of having the people stay in their hometowns and spending a large sum of tax payers money on wasteful attempts to clear radioactive materials, the Japanese government should have spent the money on relocating the people from the radioactive area and helping them start new lives. The government policy has been biased toward underestimating nuclear and radioactive risks because it is determined by the interest of an "iron pentagon" connecting five influential groups in Japan: that is, bureaucrats, politicians, big businesses, the mass media, and some academics close to the government. In the case of the nuclear industry, they have formed a vested interest group called "a nuclear village." Unfortunately the general public are outside of the "iron pentagon." And they are the ones who bear the consequences of the mistaken government actions.