

Japan's Nuclear Rescuers: 'Inevitable Some of Them May Die Within Weeks'

By Dominic Di-Natale; Published March 31, 2011 | FoxNews.com



AP / March 14: A Red Cross rescue worker, in red, is scanned for signs of radiation upon returning from Fukushima to his hospital in Nagahama, Shiga Prefecture.

Workers at the disaster-stricken Fukushima nuclear plant in [Japan](#) say they expect to die from radiation sickness as a result of their efforts to bring the reactors under control, the mother of one of the men tells Fox News.

The so-called Fukushima 50, the team of brave plant workers struggling to prevent a meltdown to four reactors critically damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, are being repeatedly exposed to dangerously high radioactive levels as they attempt to bring vital cooling systems back online.


Speaking tearfully through an interpreter by phone, the mother of a 32-year-old worker said: "My son and his colleagues have discussed it at length and they have committed themselves to die if necessary to save the nation.

"He told me they have accepted they will all probably die from radiation sickness in the short term or cancer in the long-term."

The woman spoke to Fox News on the condition of anonymity because, she said, plant workers had been asked by management not to communicate with the media or share details with family members in order to minimize public panic.

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Japan is dealing with a major nuclear crisis following the deadly magnitude 9 earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

She could not confirm if her son or other workers were already suffering from radiation sickness. But she added: "They have concluded between themselves that it is inevitable some of them may die within weeks or months. They know it is impossible for them not to have been exposed to lethal doses of radiation."

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (or TEPCO), says medical teams conduct regular testing on the restoration workers for signs of contamination-related illness. It claims there have been no further cases following the three workers who were treated last week after coming into direct contact with radioactive water. There are no reports of new members of the Fukushima 50 developing radiation sickness.

Although two suffered radiation burns to their legs and ankles and absorbed radiation internally, they have since been released from the hospital and are regularly being checked for signs of any deterioration in their condition, says TEPCO.

The company has pledged to improve the tough conditions for workers who stay on the site due to the short turnaround of shifts on safety grounds.

Some restorers directly tackling the problems with the fuel rod containment chambers are limited to 15 minutes at a time inside the reactor buildings or working near highly radioactive substances, including traces of plutonium that have appeared at numerous locations within the plant complex.

Living conditions for the hundreds of employees staying within the plant's perimeter to support the restoration efforts are also equally as hazardous, say the authorities.

Banri Kaieda, the interior minister who also acts as a deputy head of the nuclear disaster task force jointly set up by the government and TEPCO, said 500 to 600 people were at one point lodging in a building within the complex. He told a media conference it was "not a situation in which minimum sleep and food could be ensured."

Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency says that workers were only eating two basic meals of crackers and dried rice a day, and sleeping in conference rooms and hallways in the building.

According to Kaieda, not all of the workers had apparently been provided with lead sheeting to shield themselves from potentially radiation-contaminated floors while sleeping.

"My son has been sleeping on a desk because he is afraid to lie on the floor. But they say high radioactivity is everywhere and I think this will not save him," said the mother of the worker who spoke to Fox News.

Meanwhile, bad weather has delayed TEPCO's plans to limit the spread of radiation from the plant. It has intended to spray a water-soluble resin to affix radioactive particles and substances to the debris sent scattered across the devastated complex to prevent it from being dispersed by wind and moisture.

It will now attempt on Friday test the synthetic solution using remote control vehicles to spray an area of 95,000 square yards at reactors four and six. The company hopes the resin will provide sufficient protection to allow restoration workers better access to areas critical to restoring the reactors' cooling systems to prevent a meltdown.

Growing pools of dangerously radioactive water and deposits of plutonium have been inhibiting access to important parts of the plant.

A large sea tanker is also being prepared to siphon and ship the water from the plant after it was discovered that run-off containers and drainage tanks were almost full at three of the most critical reactors.

The government says it has yet to be decided where they will dispose of that water. Read more...

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