News from Beyond Nuclear
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Beyond Nuclear joins international protest against “normalization” of radioactivity hazards in Japan

2 rem per year “permissible” doses to school children condemned as “inhumane”

Takoma Park, Maryland—On this, the 25th commemoration of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe, Beyond Nuclear has joined a growing international environmental coalition in calling upon the Japanese government to retract its announcement that 2 rem per year radiation dose rates are “permissible” for school children in Fukushima. Fukushima is the prefecture where the severely damaged Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) Dai-Ichi nuclear power plant is located, and has been hardest hit by the large-scale, hazardous radioactivity releases that began within days of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, and which have continued ever since.

Japanese environmental organizations, including Green Action, Greenpeace Japan, Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, Citizens Against Fukushima Aging Nuclear Power Plants (Fukuro-no-Kai), Osaka Citizens Against the Mihama, Oi, and Takahama Nuclear Power Plants (Mihama-no-Kai), and Friends of the Earth Japan, have organized this emergency petition to the Japanese government. It will be delivered on May 2nd.

The petition “urgently demand[s] the withdrawal of the Japanese Government’s inhumane decision to force 20mSv [2 rem] per year radiation exposure onto children.”

On April 19th, the Japanese federal Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) notified the Board of Education and related institutions in Fukushima Prefecture that the level of 20 millisieverts per year (mSv/y, equivalent to 2 rem per year) is a “permissible” Radiation Safety Standard for schools in Fukushima Prefecture, to be used for school grounds and buildings. The Japanese federal government has indicated that 20mSv/y is equivalent to 3.8 microSv per hour measured outdoors.

3.8 microSv/h is roughly 6 times [the 0.6 microSv/h] the “permissible” level allowed for “Radiation Controlled Areas” (0.6 microSv/h or more). The Japanese federal Labour Standards Act prohibits those under the age of 18 from working under such radiological conditions.

The petition states “Forcing children to be exposed to such radiation doses is an exceedingly inhumane decision. Therefore, we condemn this in the strongest terms.”
The emergency petition demands from the Japanese Government a retraction of the 20mSv/y “permissible” radiation dose standard for children, as well as disclosure of the names of the experts, who deemed 20mSv/y for children to be safe.

“Permissible doses are not safe doses,” said Cindy Folkers, radiation health specialist at Beyond Nuclear. “The U.S. National Academies of Science has repeatedly confirmed for decades that any exposure to radioactivity, no matter how low the dose, still carries a health risk.”

20 mSv/y is comparable to the [legally] recognized dose for inducing leukemia in nuclear power plant workers. It is also comparable to the maximum dose allowed for nuclear power plant workers in Germany. It is based on International Commission for Radiological Protection (ICRP) recommendations. However, both Japan and the United States allow workers to legally receive up to 5 rem (or 50 mSv) per year of radiation exposure.

In addition, this 20mSv standard for Japanese school children does not take into account the fact children have higher sensitivity to radiation than adults, nor does it take into account any internal radiation exposure, as from ingesting contaminated food and water, or inhaling contaminated dust and air. In the U.S. and many other countries, radiation health standards are inappropriately based upon a “Reference Man” – a 25 year old white male – which is not adequately protective of children, whose high rate of cell division and immature immune systems leave them more vulnerable to radioactivity’s hazards.

The Japanese environmental organizers of the petition also noted that at the governmental negotiation held on April 21st, it became evident that the Japanese Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) authorized the 20mSv/y standard for children as “permissible” without even undertaking any formal consultation. Moreover, on April 22nd, the Commission reported to the office of Mizuho Fukushima, a member of the Japanese Diet and leader of the Social Democratic Party in the House of Councillors, that no minutes or records exist of the five Nuclear Safety Commission members’ deliberation which led to the 20mSv/year standard’s approval.

On April 22nd, Kenji Utsunomiya, Chair of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, published a statement containing many questions, concerns, and recommendations regarding the Japanese federal government’s 2 rem per year “permissible” radiation dose rate for children.

“For 25 years now, the global community’s response has been inadequate to protect the children of Chernobyl from the lingering radioactive hazards they still face in contaminated areas,” said Kevin Kamps, radioactive waste specialist at Beyond Nuclear. “This attempt to put the children of Fukushima at unnecessary and undue radioactivity risk is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to stand.”

A copy of the petition, as well as the statement by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, is available at the top of Beyond Nuclear’s homepage, www.beyondnuclear.org.

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