Beat: Miscellaneous

Fukushima radiation levels 18 times higher than previously thought

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USPA News - Radiation levels at Japan`s crippled Fukushima nuclear plant are 18 times higher than previously thought, the plant`s operator said on Sunday, blaming previous readings on inadequate equipment that was not capable of detecting high radiation levels. The Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said it detected radiation of 1,800 millisieverts per hour near the bottom of a storage tank at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power, where authorities declared a serious incident last month after highly contaminated water was found leaking from a tank.

"We deeply apologize for the great anxiety and inconvenience caused by the recent contaminated water issues at the Fukushima Daiichi NPS, which affects the residents near the power station and the broader society," a Tepco spokesperson said, emphasizing that not the whole area is engulfed in high levels of radiation. The company reported radiation of 100 millisieverts per hour on August 22, but experts are now known to have used inadequate equipment that was not capable of detecting higher radiation levels. The new instruments that were used on Saturday were capable of detecting radiation up to 10,.000 millisieverts. Tepco rejected media reports that claimed the higher levels of radiation could kill a person after four hours of exposure. "We believe that simply comparing the 1,800 mSv with those standard levels is not proper, since the standard levels are accumulation of effective dose (not equivalent dose) that express effects for the whole body," the spokesperson said. The high levels of radiation were measured at approximately 5 centimeters (1.9 inch) above the ground, while the radiation levels at 50 centimeters (19.6 inches) above the ground were measured at only 15 millisieverts per hour. "Thus, 1,800 mSv does not mean the radiation level of the whole nearby place," Tepco said. The vast majority of the detected radiation involved beta rays, which are easier to protect against and travels only a short distance. "Moreover, since beta radiation is weak and can be blocked by a thin metal sheet such as aluminum, we think that we can control radiation exposure by using proper equipment and cloths," the spokesman said. The disaster began in March 2011 when an enormous 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of northeastern Japan, generating a devastating tsunami that wiped out entire communities. A building housing the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant exploded and three of its nuclear reactors suffered a meltdown, triggering the world`s worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. More than two years after the accident, as the world has moved on and parts of the affected region have begun recovering, a 19-kilometer (11.8 mile) exclusion zone still surrounds the disaster site at the nuclear power plant. Fearing danger from radiation, the 21,.000 residents of nearby Namie-machi are still not allowed to enter what was once their city.

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