

Japan: Alpinists' club produces color-coded map of radiation levels on Fukushima mountains

More boars mean more damage in Fukushima

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FUKUSHIMA — An alpinists' club based here in the prefectural capital has completed a color-coded map of radiation levels on mountains across the prefecture.

This is the first time since the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster that such a map has been produced, and shows that mountains to the west of the power plant have high radiation levels, while mountains further inland have lower levels.

The Fukushima Tokokai conducted its survey of 143 mountains in the prefecture between October 2011 and September 2013. Members of the club equipped with dosimeters that measure gamma rays emitted by cesium took radiation levels one meter from the ground at five to 10 locations per mountain, such as trail starting points, turnoffs and peaks. The averages of five measurements per point were recorded, and the highest average figure on each mountain was used in the map.

The greatest radiation levels were found on Toratoriyama on the border of the village of Iitate and the city of Date, where at 6.6 microsieverts per hour, radiation levels were 29 times the government standard of 0.23 microsieverts per hour maximum permissible radiation exposure among members of the general public.

Hiyama, which stands on the border of Nihonmatsu and another municipality, was found to have radiation levels of 5.2 microsieverts per hour, while Nekonakiyama in the city of Iwaki and Kamakuradake in the city of Tamura each recorded 5.1 microsieverts per hour.

Radiation levels on mountains to the northwest of the Fukushima power plant were found to be the highest, with some high figures found also in some mountains southwest of the plant.

An examination of the shift in radiation levels from 2011 to 2013 showed that compared to peaks and ridges, levels in valleys did not drop as much.

"Even on the same mountain, radiation levels tended to be higher in coniferous forests and areas with brush," said Isao Izumi of Fukushima Tokokai, who led the survey. "In the case of mountains in the mid-western part of the prefecture, in the winter if there was a lot of snow, radiation levels dropped to one-fourth that of the summer. We found radioactive hotspots in the western part of the prefecture, and trends in how radiation levels dropped varied from mountain to mountain. We plan to carry out further surveys."

* Mainichi Shimbun, October 1, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131001p2a00m0na014000c.html>

More boars mean more damage in Fukushima

FUKUSHIMA — Wild boars are taking a toll on agriculture in Fukushima Prefecture as farmers struggle to bounce back from the planting bans imposed after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011.

The boars are multiplying and entering areas they previously avoided as underbrush once routinely cleared in the nearby mountains grows back, affording them places to hide.

In late August, 61-year-old Noriyoshi Kato from the Onami district in the city of Fukushima looked at his rice paddy in despair.

“They came and did this at night,” the rice farmer said as he surveyed the damage done by the wild boars.

Kato began planting rice after the government lifted the ban imposed on the district after the disaster in 2011.

With harvest time just a month away, the boars apparently had crawled under an electric fence Kato had set up around his field to protect the budding ears of rice.

“The boars wouldn’t come near the rice paddies before the accident,” Kato said.

In those days, the wild boars kept to the mountains, apparently because they could not hide themselves in areas cleared of brush by humans.

Now overgrown, the areas are attracting the boars.

A 2012 study by the Environment Ministry found boars in almost every area inside the 20-km exclusion zone.

“It is very likely that the area of their activities expanded since many people were evacuated (from the exclusion zone) and the number of boars captured is decreasing,” the ministry speculates.

In fiscal 2010, 3,736 boars were captured in Fukushima Prefecture, rising to a record high of 4,856 in fiscal 2012. More wild boars are also showing up in towns and cities outside the 20-km exclusion zone.

Meanwhile, the number of licensed hunters in Fukushima Prefecture has decreased by one-third, from 4,779 in fiscal 2010 to 3,328 in fiscal 2011, a trend that shows no sign of reversing.

A local official in charge of hunting said the idea that wild boar meat could be irradiated has reduced interest in bagging the wild animals among the already aging population of hunters.

The government has offered subsidies and prize money to try to resolve the problem, while the Environment Ministry plans to set up boar traps within 20 km of the nuclear plant starting in November.

The situation has also prompted prefectural officials and farmers, seeking to revitalize the prefecture's industry, to alleviate the damage by setting up electric fences and conducting large-scale hunts.

But "it is a cat-and-mouse game, because they reproduce quickly," said Hiroshi Sakai, manager of Fukushima Prefecture's nature conservation division.

Ideally, it would be better to go back into the mountains and create a buffer zone by cutting undergrowth, Sakai said, adding that the delay of decontamination activities in the mountains is hindering locals from managing the area.

Kyodo News, September 24, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/24/national/more-boars-mean-more-damage-in-fukushima/#.UkjHxX9jbRY>
