

# **Fukushima: Workers facing an increased risk of accidents due to chronic sleep deprivation and fatigue**

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## **Fatigue sets in on nuke responders**

Workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are facing an increased risk of accidents due to human error caused by chronic sleep deprivation and fatigue, an expert on social medicine said Wednesday in Tokyo, as he called for improved working conditions at the plant.

Ehime University professor Takeshi Tanigawa, who has visited the crippled power plant twice since the March 11 quake, said workers are getting only two days off every four days as they go about the trying task of keeping the nuclear reactors cool. Although they finally got separate beds last month, the workers still don't have proper shower facilities, he noted.

"I thought that sanitary conditions (for the workers) were not good," Tanigawa, who has worked part-time as a physician for Tokyo Electric Power Co. since 1991, said at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. When he first visited ground zero in April, the workers were having to share blankets.

Most lived within the 20-km no-go zone around the power plant and "did not have a place to go home to," Tanigawa said.

In addition to the inadequate conditions, the medical expert stressed that Tepco employees laying the groundwork at the crippled power plant are facing a quadruple threat that may cause serious mental stress.

"There is the danger of their work, and they are also themselves victims of the earthquake," Tanigawa said, adding that most lost at least one family member or friend in the disaster.

Being an employee of the company responsible for the accident is also taking a toll on their mental health, he said.

Many of the workers went as long as 10 days straight without a bath or proper rest after March 11. They also witnessed the hydrogen explosions nearby "and testified that they were prepared for death," according to Tanigawa. "Their level of stress is something unimaginable," he said, adding that psychological care will be necessary for their posttraumatic stress.

Tanigawa expressed concern over the decision to cut the number of workers, thus increasing the workload on those remaining at the plant.

**By JUN HONGO**, *Japan Times* Staff writer

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**P.S.**

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