

Fukushima fallout said 30 times Hiroshima's

Thursday 1 September 2011, by [HONGO Jun](#) (Date first published: 24 August 2011).

Expert paints dire picture of decontamination zone, slams government for foot-dragging.

Video footage of Tatsuhiko Kodama's impassioned speech before a Diet committee in July went viral online recently, showing the medical expert's shocking revelation that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant spewed some 30 times more radioactive materials than the fallout from the Hiroshima atomic bombing.

Kodama, a professor of systems biology and medicine at the University of Tokyo, used clear-cut terms to get his message across. His ruthless criticism of the government's slow response has been viewed at least 1 million times.

"It means a significantly large amount of radioactive material was released compared with the atomic bomb," he told the Diet committee.

"What has the Diet been doing as 70,000 people are forced to evacuate and wander outside of their homes?"

Despite a hard-nosed image, the expert on radiology and cancer briefly showed a softer side while speaking to The Japan Times about his two grandchildren and their summer in the Tokyo heat.

"A lot of people ask me this, but Tokyo is safe from radiation now," Kodama, who heads the university's Radioisotope Center and the Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology, said Aug. 12.

"My two grandchildren swim outside in the pool, and there is no concern with the safety of food at this point."

But his expression became grave when discussing the 20-km no-go zone in Fukushima, explaining that decontamination of such areas will take not years but decades.

There are places he wouldn't let his grandchildren spend time outdoors freely, even in areas outside of the restricted zone.

"Cesium has been detected from urine and breast milk from those residing in Fukushima Prefecture, and the cause for that is still not specified," he warned.

Kodama said he can't give an estimate of how many people will suffer from cancer symptoms due to exposure to radiation, or how long it will take for signs to surface.

There simply isn't enough epidemiological statistics to do that, he said.

But the government and scientists shouldn't be wasting time playing guessing games, he stressed.

"My theory is this — instead of trying to decide what is safe and what isn't at this point, we should

focus on properly measuring the level of contamination in each area and on how to cleanse them.”

According to Kodama, the Radioisotope Center estimates that radioactive materials released from Fukushima No. 1 amount to about 29.6 times of that released by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

The group also found out that radiation from Fukushima will only decrease by one-tenth per year, which is about 100 times slower than radiation from the bomb.

The most difficult problem for the scientists trying to cope with the situation is that the Fukushima crisis is unprecedented.

“There are a lot of unknown (factors) regarding how this level of radiation will affect children and pregnant women,” Kodama said, pointing out that the 1986 Chernobyl accident suggests the government should be on alert for any signs of bladder and thyroid cancer.

But apart from the aftermath of the Chernobyl incident, not many statistics are available to predict what may transpire, he said.

Still, that doesn’t justify the government’s slow response to Fukushima, he added.

For starters, the Diet has been extremely inept in updating laws on controlling radiation contamination.

While the Radiation Damage Prevention Law was created for handling small amounts of highly radioactive materials, specifically to handle accidents on site at nuclear plants, the Tohoku region is experiencing radioactive contamination in a radius beyond 200 km.

The situation calls for a completely different approach, yet the Diet has failed to update the prevention law.

That alone has been a major hindrance for scientists trying to diminish the damage in Fukushima, including Kodama, who pays visits to the prefecture every weekend to conduct decontamination efforts with his peers.

Another sign of a lax government can be seen in how local governments appear to be short of equipment to measure radiation contamination in food and other produce.

Considering that contamination will be a major problem for the next couple of decades, the central government shouldn’t hesitate to invest in and develop, even mass-produce, equipment that can allow checks for radiation.

Some companies have told Kodama it would only take three months to develop a system for efficient radiation measurement.

Kodama advised the government to take two different approaches in decontaminating Fukushima.

The first step should focus on creating a rough map of the wider area and the level of contamination, possibly using remote-control helicopters and Japan’s advanced GPS system.

For emergency decontamination procedures, each community should have a call-in center that conducts quick cleanups once a request is made from residents.

Kodama said the government has spent approximately ¥800 billion to decontaminate land after a

mass cadmium poisoning broke out in Toyama Prefecture in 1912.

Contamination from radiation in the current crisis has spread to about 1,000 times that area, and the final cleanup cost is expected to be astronomical.

But both time and money should not be considered an issue, because it is the responsibility of this generation not to pass on the contaminated land to the next, Kodama said.

"I am aware that there are many opinions regarding nuclear power. However, I believe all of us can agree that Fukushima and the surrounding area needs to be decontaminated as soon as possible," he said.

By JUN HONGO

Staff writer

P.S.

* The Japan Times, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011:

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110824f2.html>