

# Evacuees of Fukushima village report split families, growing frustration

Monday 20 February 2012, by [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2012).

IITATE, Fukushima — Frustration, deteriorating health, and a growing feeling of unfair treatment are being reported by residents who have evacuated from this village, a local government survey has found.

A survey by the Iitate village government obtained responses from some 1,743 people who have evacuated from the village, which lies within the emergency evacuation preparation zone around the damaged Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. It shows that many residents are experiencing growing frustration and instability due to the nuclear crisis at the plant and an inability to return to the lives they were living before the disaster.

Sixty percent of respondents stated that their health and the health of their families had deteriorated after evacuating, while 39.9 percent reported feeling more irritated compared to before the disaster.

“Stress is causing disputes among many evacuated residents,” Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno told the Mainichi in a recent interview. “Depression and the collapse of families are increasing. There are conflicts between family members, people from different generations, and people who want to return and those who can’t go back,” Kanno said.

According to the survey, over 50 percent of all evacuated residents currently live apart from their families — a factor that authorities believe could be one of the major causes for the building frustration.

A total of 55.7 percent reported living with their children as before the nuclear crisis, while the percentage of those who were forced to separate with their children and evacuate to different locations stood at 21.3 percent. A little over 15 percent reported living with some of their children, while having the others evacuate to a separate place.

Summarizing all responses to questions related to evacuees’ current family status, one-third of all surveyed families live apart from their children, while 50.1 percent live away from other family members (including elderly parents) with whom they lived before the disaster.

The survey also showed that 34.7 percent of the evacuees have suffered salary cuts of 50 percent or more since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. A total of 36.8 percent reported a lack of sleep, while 17.9 percent reported smoking or drinking more than before they evacuated.

Iitate was designated by the government as an emergency evacuation preparation zone on April 22, 2011, approximately a month and a half after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The majority of residents evacuated to other places within Fukushima Prefecture and to various locations outside the area. Currently, about 30 percent of all Iitate evacuees live in temporary housing units.

However, a growing sense of injustice among residents who live in houses leased by the prefecture when they compare themselves with those living in temporary housing complexes is gradually taking place, sources say.

Many are beginning to complain that aid is delivered primarily to temporary housing units, while those who have taken refuge in other places rarely benefit from it. Some have referred to the current conditions as “discrimination.”

In fact, 80 people among all surveyed evacuees requested “fair aid distribution also to those who do not live in temporary housing units.”

Growing frustration and concerns were also apparent from people’s free answers in the survey.

“When I suddenly remind myself of Iitate, I become so sad that I can’t hold back the tears. I feel at a loss about what to do and become very insecure. My child also cries sometimes, saying ‘I want to go back,’” wrote one person, while another stated, “Living has become a burden.”

Another resident reported personal trauma as a result of the evacuation, stating: “My relationship with a close friend worsened after I was blamed for evacuating to a different prefecture.” Another wrote: “I don’t have the will to do anything. I also don’t have an appetite.”

“Many residents feel that they have been forced to evacuate because of a man-made disaster, not a natural calamity,” says Kanno. “Before, when bad weather or other problems occurred, everyone was on the same boat — so people had the will to help each other. In the case of a natural disaster, people know that even if there are difficulties at the beginning, they can eventually start all over again even from scratch. However, when one is fighting against radiation pollution, starting a new life three, or even five years later is not easy. That is one of the characteristics of (the invisible damage caused by) radiation.” For this reason, decontamination efforts over the period of a year or two years (after the disaster) are vital (for residents’ futures). The government should improve the conditions so that people will feel ready and safe to return to their homes, but unfortunately, its way of thinking is too loose.”

*Mainichi Shimbun*, January 30, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/01/30/20120130p2a00m0na009000c.html>

---

## **Futaba mayor angered by TEPCO and gov’t disregard**

“Do you think of Futaba county residents as Japanese citizens?” Futaba town mayor Katsutaka Idogawa pressed the prime minister in a meeting on Jan. 8. The two were face to face in the capital of Fukushima Prefecture, and according to media reports, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda had just re-sought permission to establish an intermediate storage facility for radiation-tainted soil and other waste in the prefectural county of Futaba.

The town of Futaba, where the No. 5 and 6 reactors of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are located, is a designated nuclear disaster no-entry zone, and its residents are still scattered across the country.

Idogawa is known as the only mayor of all eight town and village mayors in Futaba county to openly

oppose the construction of a storage facility within the county. The towns of Futaba and neighboring Okuma — where the Fukushima plant's crippled No. 1 reactor is located — have recorded high levels of radiation, and are believed to be top contenders as storage facility sites.

"I'm not saying that we absolutely won't allow it," Idogawa says in the principal's office of a former high school in Saitama Prefecture. Since evacuating from Futaba, Idogawa, clad in a work uniform, has made this office his base. "It's just that there are certain things that need to be cleared up first. (Fukushima No. 1 plant operator) Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which assured us there wouldn't be any accidents, has yet to make amends. And yet they say they want to build a facility. The order is all wrong."

What especially angers Idogawa is that in response to TEPCO stockholders' calls for a compensation lawsuit against TEPCO's management, the company's corporate auditor sent a notice dated Jan. 13 stating: "There was no lack of due diligence (on the part of TEPCO) that would warrant a liabilities claim."

"To say that (TEPCO) board members are not responsible makes a complete mockery of us," Idogawa fumes. "If they aren't responsible, why should we have to accept all this radiation? Whose fault is it that we're living as evacuees? Isn't the act of exposing us to radiation a crime? Isn't it?"

The Environment Ministry has said that an intermediate storage facility would be used for 30 years or less.

"If (the radioactive waste) is going to be left there for decades, there needs to be a different type of scheme or guarantee from the one we'd had until now," Idogawa says. "They've got it all wrong, trying to force us to host a facility without any such discussion. If a much larger tsunami or other kind of catastrophe were to occur in those decades, they couldn't get away with once again saying 'it was beyond all expectations.' We wouldn't be able to defend ourselves when our descendents ask us why we agreed to such conditions."

Some criticize the bluntness of a mayor who had until now coexisted with the nuclear power plant. In fact, in April last year, soon after the disasters struck, Idogawa openly disagreed with the Cabinet of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan's proposed review of the country's nuclear plant expansion plans, claiming it was "too soon" to decide.

"I've been bashed, with people saying 'it's your responsibility for agreeing to host the nuclear power plant in the first place.' I'm willing to accept that. Thinking back, though, I can tell that the safety of nuclear power plants was just make-believe. They tried to hide what was really on the inside. Or maybe we just couldn't see the truth."

The national government is planning to review the no-entry and planned-evacuation zone designations in April. Areas with annual radiation doses of 50 millisieverts and above will be designated "no homecoming zones," areas with doses between 20 millisieverts and 50 millisieverts as "restricted habitability zones," and areas with less than 20 millisieverts will be designated "evacuation order termination preparatory zones."

The zone reorganization is meant to allow residents from areas that are relatively safe to return to their homes before those living in more contaminated areas. However, some residents are unenthusiastic about this possible "partial" return plan. In Futaba, too, there is a possibility that residents from its coastal areas — which suffered the brunt of tsunami damage but has relatively low radiation levels — will be issued the go-ahead to return home early.

Idogawa, however, shakes his head. "It's not possible for people from just those pockets of the town

to survive on their own. The annual radiation dose may be 20 millisieverts or lower, but is it an environment where people would want to live?" he asks. "The residents are not guinea pigs. That's what I meant when I asked the prime minister if he thought of (Futaba) residents as Japanese citizens. Forget about declaring the crisis under control; we're absolutely not there yet."

A screen capture of a Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology map displaying the diffusion of the radioactive element tellurium 129m around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. (Mainichi)

A screen capture of a Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology map displaying the diffusion of the radioactive element tellurium 129m around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. (Mainichi)

The Futaba municipal government has divided the town's path toward reconstruction into three major steps. The current situation constitutes step 1, in which all 7,000 or so of the town's residents are living away from home. Step 2 is the establishment of a "provisional Futaba town" somewhere outside of Futaba, where town residents will rebuild a community. "The third and final step entails a return to Futaba once it's confirmed safe," says Idogawa.

Futaba officials are now in talks with the national government about potential sites for the provisional Futaba. However, as far as the town government knows, its residents are dispersed across the country from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south, and Futaba officials believe that as they get settled, they will have less and less reason to come back.

Step No. 3, meanwhile, is far from being realized.

"I want you to make this crystal clear in the article," Idogawa says. "I don't want to make the residents live any more in an environment soaked in radiation. I, too, was exposed to ashes from the explosion at the No. 1 reactor. We won't have any more of this."

Can Futaba exist again as a community? The mayor, standing at a crossroads, continues to negotiate the various points of this delicate situation with the state. Herein lies the anguish of a town hosting a nuclear power plant.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, February 13, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/13/20120213p2a00m0na012000c.html>

---

## **Residents wary of call to return to village near crippled Fukushima plant**

The village government of Kawauchi, near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, has begun calling for its residents to return, but many are staying away, wary of radiation.

Takayuki Sekine, 36, who evacuated from the village in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, now lives with six other family members in a temporary housing unit in Koriyama.

"Thinking of my two children's safety, I don't intend to return for the time being," he says.

Sekine's 8-year-old daughter now attends a school in Koriyama, around eight kilometers from the temporary housing unit. The classes are being held by the school she went to in Kawauchi, in

borrowed space, and a school bus is dispatched for the children. However, if her school were to return to Kawauchi at the beginning of the next school year, the bus service would likely stop, and her parents would become responsible for delivering her to school. Still, Sekine is reluctant to move his children back now that they've finally adjusted to their new school environments.

One of the friends of Sekine's daughter is the child of a Kawauchi government worker and is scheduled to move back. Another friend plans to change to a school within walking distance of the temporary housing unit.

"The nuclear plant situation is not yet under control. It doesn't make sense to call for a return to the village before safety has been confirmed. I think this kind of self-decision (by village authorities) is irresponsible," says Sekine.

Before the nuclear disaster, Sekine was self-employed, taking on contracts for work like plumbing or spraying agricultural pesticide. However, over 90 percent of the places he worked were in the neighboring towns of Naraha and Tomioka, now within the no-entry zone set up around the nuclear plant. The Kawauchi village government has said that jobs will be available in radiation decontamination work, but this does not alleviate Sekine's concerns.

"Why should those of us who fled from radiation now have to do jobs where we are bathed in it?" he asks.

Meanwhile, Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo told at a news conference on Jan. 31: "We felt that if there was a possibility people could return, we should expand that possibility." In November last year, Endo visited the site of the Chernobyl disaster. He says that, seeing how the residents there were forced into long-term evacuation, he felt: "If there is still something we can do, we should do it."

"If evacuated people get used to the conveniences of the city and living off of compensation payments, they will lose their drive to work and to return to their homes. If the villagers fall, the national and prefectural governments will not pick them up. People of the village have to do that," he said.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, February 1, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/01/20120201p2a00m0na014000c.html>

---

## **Village in Fukushima no-go zone to call for residents to return permanently by March**

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima — Authorities in this village, part of which still stands in the no-go zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, plan to call on all evacuated residents to return by the end of March, it has been learned.

The local government organized a meeting for residents in January, during which officials explained plans for decontamination procedures and actions that have been taken to secure employment after residents return to the village.

"Most residents seemed to agree with our explanations and plans to a certain extent," said a senior town official, who attended the meeting. Therefore, the municipal government has decided to encourage all residents to return to their homes. After consulting with the municipal assembly and

others, the village will report its decision to Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato.

On Jan. 31, the municipal government will call on residents to return home, hoping that all evacuees will move back to their homes by the end of March. School and town hall operations will be resumed from April, officials said.

This is the first time for a municipality that fell in the government-designated evacuation zones following the nuclear disaster to announce return plans for its residents.

Kawauchi village, home to approximately 3,000 people, was one of the municipalities that fell within both the government-designated no-go zone and emergency evacuation preparation zones around the troubled nuclear power complex.

Last September, the designation of an emergency evacuation preparation advisory was lifted for the western part of the village. However, even after the advisory was lifted, less than 200 residents returned to their homes. The village's eastern part still remains within the 20-kilometer no-go zone around the damaged nuclear power plant.

All Kawauchi residents evacuated from their homes in the wake of the nuclear crisis, with approximately 80 percent of them currently living in other places within Fukushima Prefecture and 20 percent having moved out of the area.

According to the municipal government's plan, the homes of some 600 households, which fall within the former emergency evacuation preparation zone, will be decontaminated by the end of March. The homes of the approximately 340 remaining households in the zone will be cleaned by the end of the year. Radiation levels, however, in all places there are low, at less than one microsievert per hour.

As for the approximately 160 households whose homes fall within the no-go zone, the local government plans to build temporary housing units in safe areas within the village, where evacuees can restart their lives.

Decontamination of a nursery and schools will be completed within February, officials said, and all administrative organs and other main facilities will resume operations starting from April.

Local authorities also plan to secure employment opportunities for returned residents, including decontamination projects that will offer jobs to some 1,000 people. In the next fiscal year, job openings in metal factories and vegetable cultivating facilities will further expand opportunities, the plan explains.

Meanwhile, however, residents cannot hide their bewilderment over the municipal government's most recent decision.

Shinichi Sakakimoto, 71, a farmer who evacuated to Koriyama in the prefecture following the nuclear disaster, says that he is not sure whether returning home will help him.

"Even if the town hall operates as usual, I don't have a car so it will be very difficult to go shopping to a nearby village," says the man, whose house falls in the former emergency evacuation preparation zone. "I want to go back eventually, but as I won't be able to work on my rice paddies for now, I won't have any income."

A 36-year-old man, whose house falls within the no-go zone, says he thinks the move is too hasty. "I don't believe that the plant has been brought under control. What will happen if another powerful

earthquake strikes? This is impossible,” he said.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, January 25, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/01/25/20120125p2a00m0na013000c.html>

---