

Japan: Evacuated residents of Fukushima no-go area set up temporary town nearby

Sunday 18 March 2012, by [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 17 March 2012).

FUKUSHIMA — The town of Okuma, which entirely falls within the exclusion zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is planning to establish an “out of town” community as residents’ forced evacuations are expected to last a long time.

On March 16, the town’s reconstruction planning committee held a meeting in Aizuwakamatsu, drawing up a draft plan to set up a “temporary town” in Iwaki or elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture, equipped with town office functions, schools and houses by 2016. Some 11,100 residents of Okuma have been evacuated out of the town in the wake of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March last year.

The move comes as a number of municipalities around the troubled nuclear plant are coming up with various reconstruction plans depending on their circumstances ahead of the expected remapping of evacuation zones in accordance with radiation levels.

The town of Okuma, whose office functions are currently evacuated to Aizuwakamatsu, will conduct a survey on residents’ feelings about the proposal and map out a concrete plan as early as in April before starting infrastructure development sometime around 2014.

As most of the town of Okuma is expected to be officially designated as a “difficult to return” zone, whose radiation doses top 50 millisieverts a year, the town’s reconstruction planning committee took into consideration members’ opinions that the “out of town” community should preferably be set up in an area near the town and whose climate is similar to that of Okuma’s. The draft plan also encompassed housing development around Aizuwakamatsu, where more than 3,000 Okuma residents have been evacuated to, as well as a policy to decontaminate the entire Okuma town 10 years later.

Meanwhile, the town of Namie, which falls within the no-go zone and the planned evacuation zone and has most of its 21,000 residents evacuated, also compiled a proposal to develop an “out of town” community on March 14. While the location of such a district will be determined after surveying residents’ desires and depending on the progress of decontamination work, the cities of Minamisoma, Iwaki and Nihonmatsu — where the town’s office functions are evacuated to — are among the candidate sites. In the out-of-town community, housing units, education and other residential service facilities and shops will be established, according to the proposal.

The town of Tomioka, which is expected to be partially designated as a “difficult to return” zone, also held a reconstruction planning committee meeting on March 16, putting forth a draft plan outline to establish housing units in the cities of Iwaki and Koriyama for residents who will not be able to return to Tomioka for a long period of time. The town, whose official population stands at some 15,000, is seeking to have it entirely habitable by fiscal 2020.

The town of Naraha, which is expected to be reorganized into an “evacuation order lifting preparation zone” — whose yearly radiation doses are 20 millisieverts or less — drew up an interim

reconstruction draft plan. This proposal envisages that the return of some 7,700 residents will start a year later upon the lifting of an evacuation order. It also foresees that all households except for child-raising generations will return to the town and the town's office functions will be fully resumed in the spring of 2014.

In consideration for potential radiation effects on children, however, school classes will be given at a temporary school building — to be completed in Iwaki this autumn — until the spring of 2015 and school systems will only be returned to Naraha after decontamination work progresses and the environmental conditions are ready to accommodate children, according to the plan.

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* Mainichi Shimbun, March 17, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/17/20120317p2a00m0na013000c.html>