

Ex-NISA head opposed improving nuclear-disaster countermeasures to int'l levels

Friday 22 June 2012, by [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 5 June 2012).

A former director-general of the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) opposed improving Japan's nuclear disaster countermeasures to meet international levels, and ignored subordinates' warnings in 2006 that disaster-related measures were flawed, internal agency documents obtained by the Mainichi have shown.

If the improvements opposed by then Director-General Kenkichi Hirose had been implemented, local residents near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant could have been evacuated more quickly, minimizing their exposure to radiation. The Diet's nuclear accident investigation committee has been checking how and why opinions within the agency failed to be adopted.

The internal documents, from the agency's review meetings, were disclosed on June 5 after the Mainichi requested access to the information under freedom-of-information legislation.

International standards for nuclear disaster countermeasures were set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2002. The standards state that if there is a chance of radioactive substances being released and spreading as the result of a nuclear accident, residents within a radius of three to five kilometers from the nuclear facility in question should evacuate immediately.

The Cabinet Office's Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) considered incorporating the international standards into the country's guidelines for disaster countermeasures in March 2006. However, NSC decided not to beef up the measures due to opposition from NISA and other parties.

According to the internal documents, Hirose was briefed by a number of agency staff members ahead of a May 2006 meeting between officials from NISA and NSC to review guidelines for nuclear disaster countermeasures. One of the agency's senior officials was quoted as telling Hirose at that time, "Our country's nuclear disaster countermeasures are out of line with international standards and there are considerable flaws." The official urged Hirose to advance the discussion with NSC on improving the measures to deal with nuclear accidents. However, most other agency staff members stood against strengthening the guidelines, saying the country's anti-disaster measures were not inferior, even from the standpoint of international standards.

Hirose eventually ignored the suggestion from the senior staff member, saying, "Training has already been conducted (under the current law) and the current structure should remain operational at least for 10 years. NISA will take a cautious stance." Hirose had the senior agency official talk on other themes at the meeting between NISA and NSC.

NSC subsequently criticized NISA's stance, saying, "It is not acceptable because it narrows the scope of discussions." NISA bluntly responded: "(NSC's suggestion) can be taken as 'misplaced anger' and (our exchanges with NSC) are a waste of time and effort." Hence, no decision was made to strengthen the measures.

The Diet's nuclear accident investigation committee grilled Hirose at its panel meeting in March this year over the issue. Hirose told the Mainichi he had "no recollection" of the proceedings.

P.S.

* Mainichi Shimbun, June 05, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120606p2a00m0na017000c.html>