

Northeast Japan: Gov't agency proposes limiting nuclear disaster aid to 33 Fukushima municipalities

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A government agency is set to designate certain municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture eligible for special assistance relating to the ongoing nuclear crisis in a draft policy framework without establishing criteria based on radiation levels, it has been learned.

The latest revelations have sparked criticism that the basic implementation policy for the Victims Protection Act drawn up by the Reconstruction Agency unfairly limits the scope of assistance the government will be required to provide.

Out of municipalities in eastern Fukushima Prefecture recognized as “areas with significant levels of radiation following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster,” the policy draft identifies 33 municipalities — with the exception of exclusion zones and their surrounding environs — as qualifying for assistance. As for the content of the “assistance,” the agency states it will consider expanding the assistance package that it announced in March.

Meanwhile, western Fukushima Prefecture’s Aizu region and surrounding prefectures will be given secondary eligibility for assistance, including external radiation exposure surveys using personal dosimeters.

According to the Victims Protection Law, the maximum permissible amount of radiation exposure per year for the general public is 1 millisievert. If this criterion is applied to air dose levels — a widely used index since the nuclear disaster broke out — in determining victim aid eligibility, areas outside of Fukushima Prefecture would qualify. As there are radiation hotspots in neighboring prefectures, limiting victim aid to within Fukushima prefectural boundaries is bound to draw protest.

The final deadline for applications for private housing rent subsidies, provided under the Disaster Relief Act to disaster victims who evacuated out of Fukushima Prefecture, came and went late last year. Some have called for the government to revive rent subsidies under the Victims Protection Act, but such a program has not been included in the Reconstruction Agency’s basic policy draft.

At the behest of the Reconstruction Agency, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) on Aug. 28 set up an expert panel, which has begun to collect data through related ministries and agencies on individual radiation dose levels in aid-eligible areas. Individual dose levels are inclined to be lower than air dose levels, and the government is believed to be counting on this tendency to encourage residents to return to their hometowns, as well as to secure scientific back-up for their method for deciding aid-eligibility.

The lawmaker-initiated Victims Protection Act was enacted in June 2012. It limits assistance qualification to areas with at least a certain level of annual cumulative radiation doses as a result of the nuclear disaster, but below 20 millisieverts — the level at which the national government’s

exclusion zone designation is lifted.

However, it has proven difficult to achieve consistency between the legislation and radiation exposure limits for the general public. Because there is a possibility that the number of evacuees will increase depending on the cut-off line for radiation levels the government will set, the Reconstruction Agency had heretofore postponed the creation of a basic implementation framework.

Residents in Fukushima Prefecture and elsewhere filed a suit at the Tokyo District Court earlier this month demanding that the agency compile a draft policy framework to fully enforce the law, which has been stalled for some 14 months.

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* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130830p2a00m0na016000c.html>