

Japan: Municipalities criticize gov't agency for limiting Fukushima disaster aid

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At least 13 municipalities in Chiba, Ibaraki and Tochigi prefectures have sent critical comments to the Reconstruction Agency for its basic policy to limit the scope of assistance to only areas in Fukushima Prefecture affected by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The 13 municipalities, which are not covered by the draft basic implementation policy under the "Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims" of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, submitted critical "public comments" on the disaster aid program to the Reconstruction Agency. The deadline for such public comments was set for Sept. 23. It is rare for municipal governments to submit such critical public comments to government authorities. Such action is largely based on a sense of injustice over the policy of limiting the scope of aid only to those people in Fukushima Prefecture. Some of the municipalities are rejecting the draft policy outright, with the Shiroyama Municipal Government in Chiba Prefecture saying, for example, "The off-the-shelf way of drawing a line by regions runs counter to the principles of law."

The law, enacted in June 2012, stipulates that areas with at least a certain level of annual cumulative radiation dosage shall be eligible for the government assistance and a basic policy containing necessary assistance measures shall be worked out. However, the draft policy worked out by the Reconstruction Agency only designated 33 municipalities in the eastern half of Fukushima Prefecture as areas eligible for the assistance, without setting specific criteria for radiation doses. The Reconstruction Agency has not clarified the scope of specific assistance for so-called "quasi-regions eligible for assistance," which include areas in the western half of Fukushima Prefecture and in neighboring prefectures.

The Reconstruction Agency publicly sought opinions on the aid scheme after announcing the draft basic policy on Aug. 30. After checking the websites of municipal governments and other sources, the Mainichi Shimbun found that 13 municipalities submitted their public comments on the draft policy to the agency. Those municipalities are: Noda, Kashiwa, Kamagaya, Matsudo, Shiroyama, Nagareyama, Sakura, Abiko and Inzai in Chiba Prefecture; Toride, Moriya, and Joso in Ibaraki Prefecture; and Nasushiobara in Tochigi Prefecture.

The central government sets the maximum permissible amount of radiation exposure per year for the general public at 1 millisievert (0.23 microsieverts per hour). The government designated those areas (municipalities) that were exposed to radiation exceeding the permissible limit as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas," and has since been providing assistance to them. Currently, 100 municipalities in eight prefectures are designated as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas," and the 13 municipalities are among them.

In their opinions submitted to the Reconstruction Agency, all of the 13 municipal governments called for attaching importance to health assistance for children and pregnant women. They are critical of the government for applying "double standards" with the decontamination law and the nuclear disaster aid law. Municipalities such as Abiko insist that those areas designated as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas" be eligible for the nuclear disaster assistance. Public comments are

solicited from the general public when laws, regulations or institutions are to be established or revised, but it is rare for local municipalities to submit critical comments en masse.

P.S.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130924p2a00m0na020000c.html>