



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

MEDIA ADVISORY – for immediate release, 19th August 2011

Fukushima and children's health – an increase in thyroid cancer? One of several issues the Weightman review should consider

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) is saddened, but not surprised, to hear that 45% of children and babies tested in the Fukushima prefecture have trace elements of internal radiation contamination in their thyroid glands, following the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility.

The report, in today's Daily Telegraph (1), found that radioactive elements were detected in the thyroid glands of 45 per cent of more than 1,000 children aged up to 15. They were tested around two weeks after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. Though the trace elements in these early test were low these figures will concern communities around Fukushima, who have just lodged a submission with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights in Tokyo arguing that their children's rights are being violated by continual exposure to radiation since the disaster began on March 11th.

The joint submission was issued by the Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation, the Citizens Against Fukushima Aging Nuclear Power Plants (Fukuro-no-Kai), Friends of the Earth Japan, Green Action Japan, Osaka Citizens Against the Mihama, Oi and Takahama Nuclear Power Plants (Mihama-no-Kai) and Greenpeace Japan (2).

Their submission notes that, following the Fukushima disaster, the 'provisional safety standard' radioactive exposure for the Fukushima prefecture was raised to 20 millisieverts per year, compared to 1 millisievert per year for the rest of Japan. The provisional standard applies to pregnant women and children, despite the vulnerability of both populations to radiation. The submission goes on to show that local communities in the Fukushima prefecture have had to resort to buying their own radiation dosimeters to monitor radiation around their schools due to a perceived lack of monitoring by the Japanese authorities. The communities also appealed to the Fukushima Board of Education that school-openings for the new term should be delayed due to the high level of contamination, but this request was refused.

The Board of Education did undertake radiation surveys of all 1,638 schools in the prefecture (on 5 – 7 April 2011) and found that 76% of them had levels of contamination exceeding what triggers designation of a workplace as "radiation controlled" (0.6 millisieverts an hour) where individuals under the age of 18 are not legally permitted to enter. At over 20% of schools even higher levels of radiation were recorded warranting "individual exposure control" if occurring in a workplace. Despite this the schools remained open and the Japanese Ministry of Education announced the higher 'safe' dosage figure for the Fukushima prefecture. Additional tests carried out for the Fukushima communities by the independent radiation measuring authority ACRO, and announced on the 30th June, noted that children between 6 and 16 had samples tainted with caesium 134 and caesium 137. They argued that the evacuation zone should be increased, which would require evacuating a further 70,000 people for their public safety.

This development follows on from an earlier report this week in 'The Independent' that Fukushima workers have reported to it that critical piping had not been adequately repaired a week prior to the

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earthquake and tsunami, and the facility may have started leaking radiation through these pipes following the earthquake, before the tsunami wave hit (3). The report also noted that radiation alarms had apparently gone off before the tsunami wave had hit. This report seemingly contradicts the preliminary findings of the IAEA's report on Fukushima and the UK interim report on implications of the Fukushima accident on the UK nuclear industry. The NFLA Chair's letter to 'The Independent' on this issue was published on August 18th (4).

Both issues are being included in the NFLA's submission to UK Chief Nuclear Inspector Mike Weightman's nuclear safety review (5). The NFLA argue that the effects of radiation exposure on human health should be considered in much more detail in the final report. It also urges the Review Group to follow-up the issues that arise from the article in 'The Independent' and determine whether the initial findings of the interim report need to be reconsidered.

NFLA UK and Ireland Chair Bailie George Regan says:

"Our thoughts are with the families in the Fukushima Prefecture at this very difficult time for them. We fully support their report to the UNHCR and I have today signed their petition of concern. I hope the Japanese Government and the UNHCR listen to their worries and deal properly and appropriately with their concerns. With questions asked this week over what actually happened at Fukushima I call on UK Chief Nuclear Inspector Mike Weightman to analyse both of these important developments and determine if changes need to be made to his upcoming final report. We believe they do and urge any new conclusions and recommendations to be acted on immediately, including possible suspension of a new nuclear build programme until the actual cause of Fukushima and its effects are properly known and understood."

Ends

For further information contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Daily Telegraph, 19th August 2011.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/8710485/Half-of-children-in-Fukushima-test-positive-for-radiation.html>
- (2) Friends of the Earth Japan media release, 18th August 2011.
<http://www.foejapan.org/en/news/110819.html>
- (3) Independent, 17th August 2011.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/the-explosive-truth-behind-fukushimas-meltdown-2338819.html>
- (4) Independent, 18th August 2011.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/letters-perspectives-on-taxing-the-highest-incomes-2339613.html>
- (5) The NFLA's submission for consideration in the Weightman's review final report will be published on August 28th 2011.

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