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Saturday, March 12, 2011

3,000 ordered to evacuate near quake-hit Fukushima nuclear plant

Kyodo News

The government declared a state of atomic power emergency Friday after the Tohoku region was hit by what is being called the strongest earthquake in Japanese history and urged around 3,000 residents near a reactor in Fukushima Prefecture to evacuate.

The evacuation advisory was issued for people living within a 3-km radius of the plant, while those living within a 10-km radius were requested to stay home, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said, adding the measure was precautionary.

Edano said one of the reactors cannot be cooled down. He added that no radiation has leaked and the incident poses no danger to the environment at the moment.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan declared the emergency even though no radiation leak has been detected after the magnitude 8.8 quake hit so authorities can easily implement emergency relief measures, Edano told a press conference. The nation has some 50 nuclear reactors and those in the quake-hit zone all reportedly automatically shut down.

In Vienna, the International Atomic Energy Agency is scrambling for details from contacts with Japan's industry ministry, while saying in a statement that at least four nuclear power plants "closest to the quake have been safely shut down" after the 2:46 p.m. quake.

According to the ministry, 11 reactors were automatically shut down at the Onagawa plant, Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 plants and Tokai No. 2 plant after the temblor, which hit 7 on Japan's intensity scale, which is to 7.

But the Fukushima Prefectural Government advised some 2,000 residents in a radius of 2 km of the No. 2 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 plant to evacuate, government officials said.

The officials said the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., reported the level of water going down in the reactor.

The problem prompted Motohisa Ikeda, senior vice industry minister, to head for Fukushima on Friday evening by Self-Defense Forces helicopter to deal with the problem.

Tepeco also said the system to cool reactor cores in case of emergency stopped at the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

At the Onagawa plant in Miyagi Prefecture, a fire started at a building housing the turbine, the operator, Tohoku Electric Power Co., said, denying it detected any signs of radiation leaks.

Water spilled from pools containing fuel rods at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant on the Sea of Japan coast in Niigata Prefecture and the Onagawa plant, the operators said, saying they saw no signs suggesting radiation leaks.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. reported no problems at its Tomari No. 1, No. 2



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and No. 3 plants on the northernmost main island.

There were no immediate signs of any problems at the Hamaoka nuclear plant in Shizuoka Prefecture, the prefecture said.

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