

70% of towns behind in N-plans / Municipalities struggling to prepare disaster measures by March deadline

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Fourteen of 20 cities, towns and villages in Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures still have not compiled their disaster management plans despite a looming deadline in March, according to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey.

The 20 municipal governments are required to prepare the plans as they are located in areas where measures for responding to potential nuclear emergencies have been deemed necessary.

Their inability to finalize the plans is apparently due to challenges arising from the fact that many residents are not living in the towns at present. Many evacuated after the crisis broke out at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, or now live in other places due to tsunami.

In October, the Nuclear Regulation Authority expanded the areas where disaster management plans to protect residents from radiation are required. Previously, locations within an eight- to 10-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants were subject to the plans, but the radius distance is now 30 kilometers.

Of the 14 municipal governments that still lack concrete plans, nine said they are unsure whether they can compile the plans by the deadline, including Higashi-Matsushima, Misato and Minami-Sanriku in Miyagi Prefecture and Naraha, Tomioka, Okuma, Katsurao, Iitate and Ono in Fukushima Prefecture. Five governments said they will definitely not be able to prepare the plans by March: Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture and Minami-Soma, Hirono, Futaba and Namie in Fukushima Prefecture.

Seven municipalities are near Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Onagawa nuclear power plant in Miyagi Prefecture and 13 are near the Fukushima Nos. 1 and 2 plants in Fukushima Prefecture.

The Yomiuri Shimbun conducted its survey in December on the 20 municipalities and 19 of them responded.

A government ordinance related to a law that established the NRA stipulates the regional plans, in which evacuation procedures and destinations will be designated, should be completed within six months of the NRA's launch. Thus the deadline for the

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municipal governments is March 18.

In the survey, only four municipal governments--those of Tome and Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture and Tamura and Kawauchi in Fukushima Prefecture--replied they will meet the deadline for compiling their respective plans.

The town government of Minami-Sanriku said it is not certain whether it will be able to complete its plan. Part of the town is within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant.

Residents living in that part of the town number about 2,300, according to data of the Basic Resident Register. But a town government official said, "We can't confirm the actual number because there are residents who have evacuated."

The town government also has not decided how to distribute stable iodine pills to residents who have evacuated.

The official said, "There are too many variable factors and thus we can't decide on specific measures for our regional disaster management plan."

The city government of Higashi-Matsushima also replied it is uncertain whether it can finish its plan.

Its city center, including the city government office, is within the 30-kilometer target zone. About 37,000 residents live in the area.

Regarding potential evacuation destinations, the municipal government said it intends to discuss the matter with neighboring municipalities, including Osaki in the prefecture.

The city government said the Miyagi prefectural government is checking on the availability of taxis and trucks that would be necessary for emergency evacuation.

An official of the city government commented, "Because so many residents will need to evacuate, compiling the disaster management plan is very hard."

In Fukushima Prefecture, 10 of the 13 municipalities required to compile the plans are located in areas that were evacuated during the Fukushima nuclear plant crisis. Most have still not finished the work.

An official of the town government of Tomioka, which has relocated its functions to an evacuation site, said: "All of the town's residents left in the evacuation. As infrastructure has still not been restored, it's difficult to compile the plan."

An official of the NRA's nuclear regulatory agency said: "Most of the former residents of designated municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have evacuated. So we understand it's difficult for them to complete the plans. We hope the municipal governments will progress with the work as quickly as possible."

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