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Fukushima crisis recalls Three Mile Island

By SCOTT DIXON
Kyodo News

CAMP HILL, Pa. — For residents near Three Mile Island, a nuclear power plant along the Susquehanna River in central Pennsylvania, images of workers at the Fukushima No. 1 facility trigger reminders of their own traumatic experiences in 1979.

"I look at the people in Japan and it's heartbreaking to me," Paula Kinney, 63, said during a recent interview at her home in central Pennsylvania.

"I speak for so many people . . . we're praying for them," she said while trying to hold back tears.



Scary similarity: The Three Mile Island nuclear power plant is seen from the nearby city of Goldsboro, Pa., on Wednesday. KYODO PHOTO

At the time of the accident, Kinney was living in Middletown, 8 km north of Three Mile Island, and had a clear view of the cooling towers from her kitchen window.

When one of the reactors, TMI-2, had a partial core meltdown after a loss of coolant on March 28, 1979, residents were first told by Lt. Gov. William Scranton that there was no evidence the released radiation was dangerous.

Kinney was one of the 140,000 people who evacuated after Gov. Dick Thornburgh recommended two days later that pregnant women and preschool

children within an 8-km radius of the plant leave.

"That was when all hell broke loose," Kinney explained, adding that after a siren malfunctioned in nearby Harrisburg, the state capitol, "people were running and screaming in the streets."

The nuclear power industry and local authorities were criticized for their response to the crisis as conflicting reports confused the public. People weren't sure how to react and protect themselves from the radiation danger.

"I think the common factor that you see . . . is the unwillingness of the government or the industry to tell people in the community what was happening," Three Mile Island Alert Chairman Eric Epstein said, "which does not give them the ability to evacuate or to make plans."

Many locals, unimpressed by the official response, have taken matters into their own hands to protect themselves from potential radiation leaks.

Camp Hill resident Debbie Davenport, 68, monitors radiation through a network of hand-held and fixed detectors.

"People should not be shut out," she said.



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- Forewarned is forearmed. This information will save lives.**
- All this does is scare people. It's not helpful.**
- It's inspired me to think more seriously about possible evacuation routes.**
- Numbers like these aren't much more than a guess.**

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"They should learn as much as they can . . . rather than to wonder or to become panicked."

"What you see on the news is shocking . . . my heart goes out to them," Jesse Dellen Jr., 63, said outside his Goldsboro home directly across the river from the plant. "If you dwell on it, it will be a miserable life."

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