Gov’t considers distributing iodine tablets to homes near nuclear plants

TOKYO — The Nuclear Regulatory Agency has announced new recommendations for changes to existing nuclear disaster safety guidelines.

Among the changes that are being considered is a plan to distribute iodine tablets to homes located within 50 kilometers of nuclear power plants, Sankei Shimbun reported Thursday. However, the agency added that such a plan would require a change to Japanese laws restricting the distribution of strong medicines.

The change is believed to have been proposed due to the fact that thousands of cases of thyroid cancer were reported in children and adolescents who were exposed to radiation following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Iodine can be used to help protect against thyroid cancer in the event of exposure to radiation following a nuclear accident.

The agency has also recommended expanding the existing evacuation zones around nuclear plants from 10 to 30 kilometers. Further guideline changes and disaster evacuation drills are to be carried out by local governments, the commission said.

13 Comments

Disillusioned OCT. 05, 2012 - 07:33AM JST
But, nuclear power is safe, isn't it? Doesn't sound very reassuring.

Farmboy OCT. 05, 2012 - 07:40AM JST
This should have happened right after the accident, but I suppose having supplies available for future problems is good.

hatsoff OCT. 05, 2012 - 07:58AM JST
However, the agency added that such a plan would require a change to Japanese laws restricting the distribution of strong medicines.

So incorporate such actions into an emergency response law. The British Embassy set up the distribution of iodine tablets to British citizens fairly quickly. I’d say this can be done quite easily, you just need to distribute these tablets to key places in the prefectures, e.g. city halls - with perhaps extra supplies at locations further from the plants, to cater for evacuees being forced away from the site of explosions.

Cricky OCT. 05, 2012 - 08:18AM JST
Key word “considering”, requires a law change to distribute medicine, homeless, extending the evacuation zone. None of which have been done in the last 18 months, doubt it will happen in the next 18

warispeace OCT. 05, 2012 - 08:20AM JST
Why do they still insist on a 30km evacuation zone? We already know from the man-made Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters that people outside this distance can be heavily contaminated. It’s obvious the authorities don’t want to admit they got it horribly wrong with Fukushima.

globalwatcher OCT. 05, 2012 - 08:26AM JST
The change is believed to have been proposed due to the fact that thousands of cases of thyroid cancer
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were reported in children and adolescents who were exposed to radiation following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. This is a well-known medical data accessible to everyone in the world. This should have been done a long time ago. As a matter of fact, all US personnels directly involved in Tomodachi Operation rescue mission were given iodine tablets while they were in Tohoku. Every government policy action of Japan is taking too long to do right things for people. It is very frustrating.

Wakarimasen Oct. 05, 2012 - 08:51AM JST

Not sure iodine tablets do the trick. anyway, thought they were closing all the plants down.

basroll Oct. 05, 2012 - 09:45AM JST

Very stupid idea, as people will panic at the first news of any ”issue” and take all the tablets at once. Iodine poisoning is not a fun thing, and while people are unlikely to die outright, they are likely to have serious side effects including some long-lasting ones. Hospitals, police departments, and other qualified technicians should have stock in case of an actual need, not whenever random unqualified people think they need it.

As for Chernobyl and thyroid cancer only 700 excess cases were discovered, and only 10 cases lead to death, NOT thousands as this article mistakenly states. Most of those were due to tainted food, especially milk. Russian government refused to admit an accident had happened until weeks after it did, and by then the damage was done. In a society as connected as Japan, there is no risk of that, and therefore very little need for potassium iodide.

The only thing I can imagine the government wanting to do this for is if they expect a tactical strike on a nuclear power plant, in which case iodine levels would spike fast enough to need tablets quickly. Makes no medical sense otherwise.

gogogo Oct. 05, 2012 - 10:03AM JST

If they are talking about this then they are planning to restart more.

Disillusioned Oct. 05, 2012 - 10:21AM JST

This could be extremely dangerous. Many people are sensitive to the amount of iodine in their bodies and could become extremely sick taking these. People with shellfish allergies are one group of iodine sensitive people. I agree they should be available, but distributing them would be a very bad idea.

SushiSake3 Oct. 05, 2012 - 10:25AM JST

Unreal. My country's embassy e-mailed me and asked if I wanted some for myself and my family - about a week or so after the meltdown.

sakurala Oct. 05, 2012 - 10:50AM JST

A little late for Fukushima and not really the best plan for the future either. If they want to keep stock of these pills, they should be a central location that would be accessible in the case of an emergency. People can receive them then and be given proper instructions on how to take them. They would be useless and a waste of money just being hidden away in someone's med. kit when a disaster strikes and they have to flee, probably leaving the pills behind.

basroll Oct. 05, 2012 - 10:51AM JST

My country's embassy e-mailed me and asked if I wanted some for myself and my family - about a week or so after the meltdown.

I guess France? Even though every radiological medicine expert warned against the use of potassium iodide tablets and prussian blue due to the low levels of iodine and cesium in the environment and food. By a week later, half the iodine is gone entirely, and within one or two days most of the iodine is no longer in the local environment.

If you regularly cook with iodized salt (in the US they have Morton's salt, in Japan none have "iodized" labeling in my local market), it provides a fairly good protection against radio-iodine at least good enough to last you until doctors can weigh in on taking potassium iodide or not.
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