

To allay Fukushima fears, radiation checks made easy in Tokyo cafes, stores

September 05, 2012

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By MIAKO ICHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

In a peaceful ivy-covered restaurant in the Fussaninomiya district in Fussa, western Tokyo, several women and children are having lunch. In the corner sits a machine that looks like a rice cooker. It is a radiation detector, made in Belarus.

When three reactors melted down in Fukushima Prefecture in March 2011, dumping radioactive materials across large areas of land and ocean, many people in Japan feared for their health and that of their growing children.

"I wasn't confident I could serve food and tell people it was safe to eat," recalled 49-year-old owner Osamu Matsuo. He shuttered the restaurant for half a year after the Fukushima disaster.

In January this year, Matsuo bought the detector and welcomed diners once more. He now checks all meals and drinks served in Restaurant Aurora. He proudly declares it a "becquerel-free restaurant."

"We need places where we can check that food is safe, in a calm manner," he said. Matsuo said many people in Japan are uncomfortable dealing with those who worry about the threat of radiation. They silence any discussion, he says, with remarks such as "You are too nervous," or "Quiet! You're making me worried."

Radiation monitoring stations now exist across Japan. Many are found in public facilities, such as local council buildings, but an increasing number are offered by private restaurants and cafes.

Matsuo encourages customers to bring items to test. For this, a reading takes at least half an hour, and they will often have a meal while they wait.

One visitor today has brought soil from her garden. The woman, in her 30s and from Okegawa, Saitama Prefecture, grows vegetables including tomatoes.

"I feed them to my kids," she said. But she always fretted over whether the soil might be radioactive.

When she and her mother finished their lunch, Matsuo came over and explained the test results.

Another radiation station is inside a store in Tokyo's Kokubunji. The shop is run by a group that promotes raising children in a natural way. It serves healthy "slow food" in an adjacent cafe, and sells wooden toys and accessories in the store. The Kodomomirai measuring station offers two radiation detectors for customers to screen their rice and vegetables with.

"I want a kid, so I'm careful about what food I put in my body," says 30-year-old Aki Yabe, a homemaker from Nerima Ward, Tokyo. She has brought some rice sent by her father, but says it took courage to come and screen it. "I was so worried about

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actually coming to a measuring station."

Yabe was visibly nervous, but she seemed to relax after chatting on a bench with the manager, 39-year-old Hidetake Ishimaru.

He says it is common for visitors to confess their worries, such as whether to let children play outside.

"I think it's important to offer counseling as well as the facts," he says.

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Some public radiation measuring stations in Tokyo:

Miy anaga Corp., Nihonbashi sea weed shop

(Chuo Ward / Tel 03-5623-1271)

CRMS Setagaya, public radiation measuring station

(Setagaya Ward / Tel 03-5787-8115)

Nippori radiation measuring station "Nikkori-kan"

(Arakawa Ward / Tel 03-3801-1211)

Kodomomirai measuring station

(Kokubunji / Tel 042-312-4414)

Hachioji public radiation measuring office, Hakaru Wakaru Hiroba

(Hachioji / Tel 042-686-0820)

Koganei city radiation measuring office

(Koganei / Tel 042-387-9831)

Public radiation measuring station Aurora

(Fussa / Tel 042-539-4139)

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