

Japan earthquake and tsunami anniversary: the man left behind in Fukushima

Only Naoto Matsumura remains inside the exclusion zone, without electricity and running water and braving the loneliness and the constant threat of exposure to elevated levels of radiation to feed a menagerie of animals.

By Glen Milner

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Tomioka, where Mr Matsumura still resides, is just eight miles from Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant – well within the 13-mile exclusion zone – and the other residents have long since fled.

"I was working when the earthquake hit and we heard on the radio that a tsunami was on its way, so I waited a while before trying to get home," said Mr Matsumura, who used to operate road-laying machinery.

"The next day, I heard the explosion at the plant," he said. "I didn't need anyone to tell me what had happened because the 'boom' was huge."

Living with his mother and father and a couple of locals in the house, they heard more explosions. Finally, they decided to head south. "I knocked on the door of my aunt's house in Iwaki, but she wouldn't let any of us in because she said we were contaminated.

"So we went to a nearby shelter, but they wouldn't let us stay there either, so we went home," he says. In April, Mr Matsumura's mother was taken ill so the rest of the family went to stay with relatives outside the original 18-mile recommended exclusion zone.

"We couldn't take the animals with us, so I stayed behind," he says.

After a year, Mr Matsumura, 52, appears to prefer the company of his animals to humans.

"I don't get bored," he says. "I am used to it, and anyway, there are lots of animals here so I'm never really alone."