

Kagoshima nuclear plant evacuation plans ‘flawed’

- ①With the Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture poised to be restarted as early as this fall, experts and critics are pointing to flaws in the evacuation plan drawn up by prefectural authorities, stirring doubt among nearby residents.
- ②Municipalities within 30 km of nuclear plants are required to craft evacuation plans after the national nuclear-disaster mitigation guidelines were revised following the 2011 Fukushima crisis. Previously, special preparations were only required for areas within 10 km of reactors.
- ③On Wednesday, the two reactors at the Sendai plant cleared an initial hurdle in the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s safety review. But experts say the prefecture’s evacuation plans, a crucial component in any emergency situation, is far from convincing.
- ④Kanna Mitsuta, a leading member of the Citizens’ Commission on Nuclear Energy who has looked into evacuation plans since the Fukushima debacle, says the biggest problem is that the elderly and medical patients who will need the most help are left out of the plan.
- ⑤Kagoshima initially released a broad disaster prevention plan in May for areas within 30 km of the plant. Recently, the prefecture unveiled an additional evacuation plan covering hospitals and care facilities within 10 km, but Gov. Yuichiro Ito has indicated he is reluctant to go into that much detail for the full 30-km radius.
- ⑥There are 17 hospitals and welfare facilities within 10 km of the plant. Within 30 km, the number soars to 244.
- ⑦“We could spend long hours creating something unrealistic, but it won’t function” in the event of an actual disaster, Ito told reporters last month.
- ⑧According to a Kagoshima official, the prefecture last September instructed facilities within the 30-km radius to work out their own emergency plans.
- ⑨Mitsuta, who is also a board member of an environmental group, said many of them have not found solutions for evacuating all the vulnerable people in their facilities, while some “did not even know” they are responsible for compiling such plans.
- ⑩In the Fukushima disaster, the lack of effective evacuation planning led to some people fleeing to areas that had even higher radiation levels, while dozens of elderly people and patients died before reaching new shelter due to a failure to arrange transportation or because of traffic congestion.
- ⑪The experts also say that Kagoshima’s evacuation plan does not consider the possibility that designated evacuation routes could be destroyed by earthquake or blocked by tsunami. They also pointed out something else not taken into account: that radiation could be spread to wider areas depending on wind direction and speed.
- ⑫“The most vulnerable people are not sufficiently considered and the lessons from the Fukushima crisis are not fully taken into account,” Mitsuta said, arguing the Sendai plant should not be brought back online if Kagoshima can’t create a cogent plan.
- ⑬Safety regulations instituted since the Fukushima crisis make it harder for reactors to be brought back online after regular inspections and maintenance. .
- ⑭NRA commissioners on Wednesday approved a draft report that concluded the Sendai plant meets the new regulations, a key step in the government’s push to revive nuclear power generation.
- ⑮But safety concerns remain a top priority among local people. Residents in Ichikikushikino, a city 5 km from the Sendai complex, have submitted to the city assembly a petition against the restart of the plant, citing inadequate emergency planning. More than half of the city’s 30,000 residents signed it.
- ⑯Meanwhile, other host communities are also struggling with plans for mass evacuation. Shizuoka Prefecture, home to the Hamaoka plant, is finding it difficult to identify shelters for a potential 960,000 evacuees.
- ⑰“We are facing countless challenges in drawing up an evacuation plan. We want to create a plan as practical as possible, but we have no idea when it will be completed,” prefectural official Kenichi Ozawa said.
- ⑱While the NRA is mandated to evaluate safety measures submitted by nuclear operators before allowing them to resume operation, the process of creating evacuation plans is largely left to the discretion of local communities, and the details are not subject to NRA screening.
- ⑲Municipal officials have called for help from the regulator as they lack of expertise and resources, but NRA officials reject the idea of the agency screening evacuation plans.
- ⑳“We could help municipalities create evacuation plans from a scientific and technical standpoint, but it is not our job to evaluate them,” NRA Commissioner Shunichi Tanaka said Wednesday. 【07/22/2014/Kyodo/Japan Times】

①poise: 用意を整える ④debacle: 崩壊 ⑫cogent: 適切な ⑬institute: 制定する ⑯discretion: 自由裁量

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. What happened on March 11, 2011 and why do the reactors remain idle for 3 years?
2. What is "NRA" and what are their responsibilities?
3. What flaws were found on the evacuation plans?
4. What do you think are the most important thing when it comes to evacuation?
What can the government do? What can the local municipalities do? What can the residents do?
5. Are you for or against maintaining the nuclear power and what do you think is the ideal energy source for Japan?
6. Can you think of any measures on how the local government and central government should work together?
7. Make sentences using following words; poise, debacle, cogent, institute, discretion, emergency radius standpoint and evacuation.

政府は原発を順次再稼働させる方針だが世論調査では反対が賛成を上回っている。環境省の外局として2012年9月発足した規制委は避難基準の指針は定めるが、自治体の避難計画を審査する権限はない。