Questions, answers from CFAY town hall meeting

From CFAY Public Affairs

The following are questions and answers from the Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka town hall meeting held at the Benny Decker Theater July 21.

The community event featured guest speaker U.S. Pacific Command Command Surgeon Rear Adm. Michael H. Mittelman:

Q: Is there a place or webpage where we can find the data from the food testing?

A: The results are not posted on a webpage because it would be numbers without context. The results are being tracked and reviewed by a health physicist daily.

Q: Are you planning to make those results available to the public?

A: Eventually that information will be made available to family members. However, before we make the results available to the public we will require guidance from higher authority.

Q: I live in Ikodachi-cho and my Japanese friend told me she read in the paper that the local sewer plant has really high levels of cesium and they are not sure where it's coming from. The plant is a mile or two from my house. Do you know anything about this?

A: We see some of the same reports that you do. It's one of the things that we should feel comfortable with. The Government of Japan is putting out almost everything that they find to the public. The levels of cesium that they are finding in the sewage plants are elevated but they are aware and are controlling it. The levels they are seeing is not high enough to affect plant workers, let alone anyone living in area.

Q: Do they know where the cesium is coming from?

A: There was a certain amount of radiation that got out and was spread fairly thinly around a wide area. This diluted material can reach a place where it starts concentrating, but not concentrated to a level that is a threat to health - we keep that to a very low detectable standard.

Q: Are you are not concerned about this, even though it is recent?

A: No, we are not concerned but we are interested. Just like everything else, we are interested in the processes and are interested in learning how this develops, but it is not a health risk.

Q: Does all the food on base come from the states?

A: The food that is sold in the commissaries,' Navy Exchanges and MWR is procured from a directory. The Department of Defense (DoD) has a worldwide directory of sanitary approved food establishments that DoD agents procure from. Do some food plants in Japan have DoD procurement contracts? The answer is yes. Early on we suspended the plants in the Fukushima area or that may have been affected by the earthquake or tsunami. The plants are being reaudited but are not back to an approved status. The vast majority of the food comes from the United States and the food imported from Japan is procured from non-affected sources.

Q: Were you testing prior to this for radiation?

A: Yes, depending on the product or type of plant. For example bottle water in the United States has routine radiation checks required by law. We do that here and our standards are based on Food and Drug Administration standards.

Q: Is it possible to get a list of where the food is from that is sold on base?

A: It is a list several thousand lines long, but you can 'Google' the "Directory of Sanitarily Approved Food Establishment for Armed Forces Procurement."

Q: I buy food and produce off base, is it considered safe?

A: The American Embassy is putting out excellent information on their website about food safety in Japan. We do not inspect the food out in the economy but I would buy it myself. The reason is, I have seen the system the Government of Japan has and the protections they have set in place to keep that food out of stores.

Q: What kind of emergency plan will be set in place to better inform people on base and off base should another big earthquake or tsunami hit Tokyo Bay?

A: Announcements wise, were working to get the "Giant Voice" working better, we have our Facebook and websites and we have 83 tenant commands trying to inform their people.

Q: Could we family members get a more detailed plan of action if something like this should happen again? It might help alleviate fears.

A: I concur with that, and there currently is a process in place now. We will work to get the information out. We are subject to the potential of a tsunami here in Yokosuka, depending on where it happens.

Q: If an earthquake hit tomorrow and a tsunami does come our way, where are we supposed to go? We don't have anyone telling us what to do.

A: On the CFAY command website there is an Emergency Management tab, which has what actions to take on various emergencies. Everyone should have an emergency preparedness kit ready in case they have to evacuate so everyone is individually prepared as well. We will work on providing more information.

Q: If someone wanted to participate in the internal monitoring, how do they go about doing that?

A: We are going to post the phone numbers to the hospital and you can make an appointment to have the monitoring done.

Q: Recently I read a news article that plutonium particles have been found in air filter on cars in Japan. Do you know anything about this?

A: This is interesting, this is the first I have heard of this. I really watch fairly closely the reports on items like this. The Japanese are doing such detailed work that they are finding other things as well. There was a report of plutonium in the ground near the plant and that was traced to United States nuclear weapons testing on Bikini Atoll.

Q: At the Fukushima plant they are dumping radiated water into the ocean. Where are the Japanese getting their fish if we want to eat sushi out in town?

A: The Japanese are not really dumping radiated water out in the ocean. They are putting the water into tanks. If you were to look at the site right now it is a tank farm. They are building somewhere around 700 tanks to store this water. The fishing industry in the Fukushima area was devastated by the tsunami and there is a ban on fishing in the area of the plant. That means that fish are not coming from that area but the fish are still undergoing extensive testing.

A: Recently there was Japanese beef that was contaminated. Do you know anything about this?

Q: There was some contaminated rice straw that was fed to some cattle and the beef from that cattle made its way to market. The Japanese have recalled the beef and stepped up testing. The acceptable limit they set in place is extremely conservative; you would have to eat so much beef that you would have to be seen for cholesterol problems before you were seen for anything else.

Q: On March 15, there was a heavy spike during the day for radiation in the Tokyo water supply. They said you could not drink the water especially for babies?

A: We know there were some variant readings but the water we were monitoring stayed within acceptable levels the whole time. We have stringent water standards and we stayed well within our safety standards.

Q: I know you said the food is safe but in May, there was a week or two with no dairy products in the commissary. I went out in town and bought milk and yogurt. Should I not have done that because of the fears of it being tainted?

A: Unfortunately people did runs on food that were unnecessary, but they did runs on food and that caused temporary shortages. As far as buying milk and yogurt on the economy, the local food safety standards remained intact throughout. There are some milk cows around Fukushima and the Government of Japan started testing throughout the affected area immediately and they have been very transparent about their results. When they discover something, they stop it, announced it and increased testing. That is why I have a high level of confidence that tainted milk did not get distributed. Since then, there is no indication there should be any concern.

Q: You said that all the background radiation levels are safe, but is it true that the levels are slightly higher than prior to the nuclear accident?

A: Yes, they are slightly higher than prior to the nuclear accident, but even with that they are really low and not a threat to human health.

Q: How about accumulative affects?

A: The background levels currently in Japan are significantly lower than several locations in the states and those levels are safe. For you to have significant effects, you would need a hundred thousand times the levels currently being seen. It could stay this way for a hundred years with out you being affected.

Q: Is it safe to swim in the sea?

A: It is unsafe to swim within a few kilometers of Fukushima, but other than that it is safe.

Q: If I want to do the internal monitoring, are there any risks or downside?

A: No, It takes three minutes. All that is done is a detector is set on a table in front of you. You sit in a chair. The detector is put up against your chest, the largest area of your body. It is a passive system that simply counts any radiation that you might have internalized in your body. So, there is absolutely no risk.

Q: The Japanese are criticizing their government, so can we really be so sure it is so safe?

A: One of the things I have learned while going through the daily grind of trying to understand what going on with both reactor plants and the radiological monitoring is that the Japanese Government really, truly is doing a great job, doing the monitoring. The Tokyo Electric Power Company is doing the best job that anyone could do to stabilize the reactors. The biggest problem they are having is that they can do a better job of communicating.

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Emergency Information

Commander Fleet Activites Yokosuka (CFAY) and Negishi and Ikego Housing Detachment residents are advised to stay tuned to the following mediums for emergency information:

- CFAY Web Site: http://www.cnic.navy.mil/yokosuka
- CFAY Facebook page: http://www.Facebook.com/cfayokosuka
- CFAY Twitter page: http://twitter.com/cfay_yokosuka
- CFAY base Channel 15
- Eagle 810 AM Radio station
- A recorded weather message can be obtained by calling 243-5155.

The information provided will include but is not limited to notification of actions to take for severe weather and the unexpected or early dismissal of schools.

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