

March 13, 2013

Second Anniversary of the North-eastern Japan Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Accident

Recovery efforts following the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant accident have continued steadily for two years. This second anniversary is a natural time to reflect on progress to date and to look forward for the future.

Perhaps the most encouraging news relates to recent information on radiation doses received by members of the public. Measurements of actual doses to individuals are significantly less than initial predictions based on conservative models. Although these doses are low, ICRP strongly encourages continued and expanded measurement of individual doses. Individual dose measurements are essential to guide actions and behaviours, and in particular to identify the people and groups most exposed. Moreover, greater attention should be paid to doses actually received by people, and less to dose rates measured in the environment, now that measurement of the former is feasible. Knowing the distribution of individual doses is a key input into decision making regarding optimisation of protection, including recovery efforts, which takes into account not only dose but also societal and economic factors.

However, there are negative effects arising from stresses due to the earthquake and tsunami, the daily difficulties of relocation in particular for the tens of thousands of people still unable to return to their homes, and continuing concerns about radiation exposure. Efforts must continue to better understand these issues, and to work with individuals and communities to deal with them.

Within the last year ICRP has focused considerable effort on understanding the situation and advising on the post-accident recovery. This has included participation in key international discussions, most notably the Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety in December 2012 in Koriyama City, organised by the Government of Japan and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the International Academic Conference on Radiation Health Risk Management in Fukushima in February 2013 in Fukushima City, organised by Fukushima Medical University.

On November 22, 2012, immediately following the ICRP Main Commission meeting held in Fukushima City, ICRP released the "Summary Report on Issues Identified

from the NPP Accident in Japan and Recommendations to Improve the System of Radiological Protection”. This summary report, available through the ICRP website, describes 18 issues and makes 11 recommendations to ICRP on areas of improvement to the system of radiological protection (a Japanese translation of this report is in progress.) Although the ICRP system of radiological protection continues to be appropriate to help ensure protection of people and the environment, these issues and recommendations will be used as a basis for further improvement. Work is already underway in some of the areas, and ICRP is in the process of prioritising efforts to address others.

The ICRP Dialogue Initiative also continues unabated. The purposes of the initiative are to facilitate discussions between local stakeholders, transfer experience from communities affected by the Chernobyl accident to Japan, share ICRP recommendations directly with the communities, and learn from those affected to improve future ICRP recommendations. Since its inception, this multi-partner initiative has included five main dialogue meetings held in Fukushima prefecture, some smaller dialogue meetings in the region, and exchanges bringing a few citizens of Fukushima to areas of Norway affected by the Chernobyl accident and vice-versa to share experiences first-hand. The dialogue meetings have tackled difficult problems, including dealing with ‘contaminated’ foodstuffs, education of children, and the question of whether to remain in or return to affected areas. Tangible results have been achieved, for example bringing together teachers to look at educational methods and tools, and changing purchasing and marketing policies of a major national food distributor. Many results of this initiative are less tangible, but no less important for being so.

There is little doubt that 2012 was a better year than 2011 for the people of Fukushima Prefecture and nearby. Progress is being made towards recovery. Nonetheless, as noted one year ago, this recovery will continue for many years to come, and ICRP remains steadfast in its commitment to remain actively involved.

On behalf of the International Commission on Radiological Protection,



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