

More Fukushima radiation detected off West Coast

Jake Ellison, SF Gate, 12-8-15

The Fukushima nuclear plant continues to leak radioactive material and more of it is showing up on the U.S. Pacific Ocean coastline, according to new data from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

The continued arrival of radioactive isotopes from the reactor severely damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan sounds pretty bad, but scientists repeatedly say running for your life would be an BIG overreaction ...

Here's Woods Hole:

Scientists monitoring the spread of radiation in the ocean from the Fukushima nuclear accident report finding an increased number of sites off the US West Coast showing signs of contamination from Fukushima. This includes the highest detected level to date from a sample collected about 1,600 miles west of San Francisco.

The level of radioactive cesium isotopes in the sample, 11 Becquerel's per cubic meter of seawater (about 264 gallons), is 50 percent higher than other samples collected along the West Coast so far, but is still more than 500 times lower than US government safety limits for drinking water, and well below limits of concern for direct exposure while swimming, boating, or other recreational activities.

The scientists also point out that had the reactors at Fukushima remained intact ... there would still be radioactive particles floating around in the Pacific. Those were produced by all the nuclear tests we did from the 1950s to 1970s.

Update: Mike Priddy, radiation expert and supervisor of Washington's Environmental Sciences Section, sent this information to us on Dec. 8:

We have not specifically sampled for Fukushima contaminants recently, but continue to monitor data from our other environmental programs that should capture any change in the radiation levels along our coast. To date we have seen no change in radiological status. We also continue to monitor what other states and provinces find and nothing so far indicates that a public health issue exists or is likely too.

Still, it's not a great thing to have radioactive waste showing up on our coastline.

"These new data are important for two reasons," said Ken Buesseler, a marine radiochemist with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in a news release.

"First, despite the fact that the levels of contamination off our shores remain well below government-established safety limits for human health or to marine life, the changing values

underscore the need to more closely monitor contamination levels across the Pacific. Second, these long-lived radioisotopes will serve as markers for years to come for scientists studying ocean currents and mixing in coastal and offshore waters."

The Woods Hole group adds in its news release:

Working with Japanese colleagues, Buessler also continues to independently monitor the ongoing leaks from Fukushima Dai-ichi by collecting samples from as close as one kilometer (one-half mile) away from the nuclear power plants. During his most recent trip this October they collected samples of ocean water, marine organisms, seafloor sediment and groundwater along the coast near the reactors. Buessler says the levels of radioactivity off Fukushima remain elevated – some 10 to 100 times higher than off the US West Coast today, and he is working with colleagues at WHOI to try to determine how much radioactive material is still being released to the ocean each day.

"Levels today off Japan are thousands of times lower than during the peak releases in 2011. That said, finding values that are still elevated off Fukushima confirms that there is continued release from the plant," said Buessler.

Are you buying it? Or, does it make you suspect officials are underplaying the danger?