

Thank You But No Chernobyl In Our Backyard

By Michelle Slade

Surfrider Foundation members in Japan are protesting against the Rokkashu Nuclear Waste Reprocessing Plant located about 435 miles north of Tokyo at Rokkasho-mura in Aomori prefecture. Expected to be fully operational by February 2008, the plant has been under construction for more than 20 years at a massive cost of some USD 21 billion.

When in full operation it is estimated that the plant will extract from spent nuclear fuel as much as 7-8 tons of plutonium annually, with the plutonium produced being one of the most radioactive elements found on earth. In one day alone, the discharge will equal a year's worth of radiation produced from a typical nuclear power plant, and that will quickly disperse into the atmosphere and water on a daily basis.

While it is purported that the end product will be reused as an energy source, for the most part it remains unclear what the Rokkasho plant's policy for handling and use of this plutonium will be. A Greenpeace-commissioned study has calculated that global radiation doses to humans from the Rokkasho plant releases are likely to be similar in magnitude to the collective dose from the Chernobyl disaster that occurred over 21 years ago.

Simply stated, this facility poses huge environmental and health threats that are frightening, particularly when those in control appear to be the least informed. In response to protests against the reprocessing plant, the Japanese government has stated, "there is no problem regarding radiation as it is diluted enough by the ocean and the atmosphere and it does not affect human health."

And, according to a 2006 radiation investigation report made by the Aomori prefecture referencing

the Rokkashu plant, it was concluded that, "as ocean water wasn't usually taken in by humans it therefore shouldn't be considered a problem."

However, we **do** know that radiation does steal its way into the earth contaminating human, agricultural and marine life, threatening the safety of food supplies and lives. For example, it is well documented from events surrounding nuclear reprocessing plants in England and France that the incidence of leukemia tended to be high among kids.

Surfers and musicians in Japan are determined to stop the Rokkasho plant. Together they have organized a tour called "Wavement" to raise awareness of the huge risks that the plant poses. The tour recently kicked off in Japan's most popular surfing area, Shonan, 31 miles southwest of Tokyo, and traveled north along the eastern coastlines of Japan creating awareness amongst surfers through discussion forums, music and arts. Quickly becoming a collective effort, the group has joined forces with farmers and fishermen who fear their livelihoods are at great risk.

Asako Oya of Surfrider Foundation Japan, is hoping that their protests will be heard, "We are standing up against our country itself which is not a small thing! It is said that there are 2,000,000 surfers in Japan. If we could get every one of those surfers to campaign with us we could be very successful and that's what we're working on right now."

Surfrider Foundation Japan has also started a petition drive against the operation of the Rokkasho plant and against the possible discharge of radiation into the atmosphere and ocean. The petition form can be downloaded at www.surfrider.jp. Please support this effort!

Michelle is a frequent contributor to Making Waves.

To sign the online petition visit: http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/rokkasho_waste

Surfers and musicians have organized a tour called "Wavement" to raise awareness of the huge risks that the plant poses.

Save the Date! The weekend of March 21-23, 2008 is Surfrider's global Ocean Initiative. Last year over 10,000 people around the world cleaned up 200+ beaches. Check out <http://www.initiativesoceans.org/> for more info or email Lia@Surfrider.org