

State of Montana *Health Alert Network*  
**DPHHS HAN UPDATE**

**DPHHS Subject Matter Resource:**

For more information regarding this HAN, contact the DPHHS PHEP Section at (406) 444-0919

**DATE:** March 16, 2011



**SUBJECT:** DPHHS HAN UPDATE 2011 – 5: Questions and Answers Related to Recent Radiation Concerns

**DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:**  
**1-800-701-5769**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

**DO NOT** forward to local HAN contacts. This is for internal public health use only.

**DPHHS HAN Website:**

[www.han.mt.gov](http://www.han.mt.gov)

**INFORMATION / RECOMMENDATIONS:**

This is for internal informational use only by the health department. No need to forward.

**Categories of Health Alert Messages:**

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Please send contact information updates to [hhshan@mt.gov](mailto:hhshan@mt.gov)

# Public Health Related Q & A Points Regarding Radiological Concerns from Earthquake Damaged Nuclear Plants in Japan

Distributed by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)

## **The radiation “plume” seems to be going out to sea – what is the danger of it reaching Alaska? Hawaii? The west coast? Is there a danger of radiation making it to the United States?**

In response to nuclear emergencies, the NRC works with other U.S. agencies to monitor radioactive releases and predict their path. The NRC continues to monitor information regarding wind patterns near the Japanese nuclear power plants. Nevertheless, given the thousands of miles between the two countries, Hawaii, Alaska, the U.S. Territories and the U.S. West Coast are not expected to experience any harmful levels of radioactivity.

## **Is the U.S. government tracking the radiation released from the Japanese plants?**

Yes, a number of U.S. agencies are involved in monitoring and assessing radiation including EPA, DOE, and NRC. The best source of additional information is the Environmental Protection Agency.

## **Has the government set up radiation monitoring stations to track the release?**

The NRC understands that EPA is utilizing its existing nationwide radiation monitoring system, RadNet, to monitor continuously the nation’s air and regularly monitors drinking water, milk and precipitation for environmental radiation. EPA has publicly stated its agreement with the NRC’s assessment that we do not expect to see radiation at harmful levels reaching the U.S. from damaged Japanese nuclear power plants. Nevertheless, EPA has stated that it plans to work with its federal partners to deploy additional monitoring capabilities to parts of the western U.S. and U.S. territories.

## **I live in the Western United States – should I be taking potassium iodide (KI)?**

At this time, the NRC does not believe that protective measures are necessary in the United States. We do not expect any U.S. states or territories to experience harmful levels of radioactivity. In the unlikely event that circumstances change, U.S. residents should listen to the protective action decisions of their states and counties. These protective action decisions could include actions such as sheltering, evacuation, or taking potassium iodide. The NRC will provide technical assistance to the states should they request it.

## **Are there other protective measures I should be taking? What are the risks to my children?**

At this time, the NRC does not believe that protective measures are necessary in the United States. We do not expect any U.S. states or territories to experience harmful levels of radioactivity. In the unlikely event that circumstances change, U.S. residents should listen to the protective action decisions of their states and counties. These protective action decisions could include actions such as sheltering, evacuation, or taking potassium iodide. The NRC will provide technical assistance to the states should

they request it. United States citizens in Japan are encouraged to follow the protective measures recommended by the Japanese government. These measures appear to be consistent with steps the United States would take.

**My family has planned a vacation to Hawaii/Alaska/Seattle next week – is it safe to go, or should we cancel our plans?**

The NRC does not expect that residents of the United States or its territories are at any risk of exposure to harmful levels of radiation resulting from the events in Japan. Any changes to travel are a personal decision. The NRC is unaware of any travel restrictions within the United States or its territories.

**What are the short-term and long-term effects of exposure to radiation?**

The NRC does not expect that residents of the United States or its territories are at any risk of exposure to harmful levels of radiation resulting from the events in Japan.

On a daily basis, people are exposed to naturally occurring sources of radiation, such as from the sun or medical X-rays. The resulting effects are dependent on the strength and type of radiation as well as the duration of exposure.

**Where would I get IOSAT Potassium Iodide if my city should experience fallout from the Japanese nuclear disaster? Is this the right precaution or is there anything else that can be done to protect myself?**

We do not expect any U.S. states or territories to experience harmful levels of radioactivity. As such, we do not believe that there is any need for residents of the United States to take potassium iodide. U.S. residents should listen to the protective action decisions by their states and counties. If necessary, protective action decisions could include actions such as sheltering, evacuating, or taking potassium iodide.

Additional information regarding the use of potassium iodide can be found on NRC's webpage at the following link:

<http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/emerg-preparedness/about-emerg-preparedness/potassium-iodide-use.html>

Since Potassium Iodide is classified as a drug. Additional information is on the Food and Drug Administration's web site. [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

**My loved one is overseas, how do I find out if they are ok?**

We are directing public inquiries with regard to concern for loved ones overseas to the State Department, Consular Services at 202-647-7004.