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Radiation monitoring bolstered

By **FRANK HARTZELL** Staff Writer -

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New radiation detectors are headed for Fort Bragg City Hall to allow better monitoring of potential fallout. This comes as a report by Bloomberg news this week revealed that some Environmental Protection Agency radiation monitors have failed or malfunctioned.

Yet, there is no evidence anyone in California has or will face danger from fallout.

Dangerous radioactivity from Japan simply can't cross the Pacific Ocean and sicken people in California, according to widely-quoted state, federal and university experts.

"The recent tragedy in Japan has sparked concern among some that unsafe levels of radiation may affect Californians," said Assemblyman Wes Chesbro, in a press release.

"I want to emphasize that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the California Department of Public Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have all stated that there is no risk expected to California or its residents as a result of the situation in Japan."

Online listservs show such pronouncements have not kept some locals from fleeing the area, putting duct tape on their windows and doors, or possibly worse, consuming potassium iodide pills.

Mendocino County Air Pollution Control Officer Chris Brown told the City of Fort Bragg that the EPA will be setting up a site in Fort Bragg after they finish installing monitors closer to Japan.

EPA has a network of radiation monitoring sites around the U.S., one of two such

independent networks. The closest site to Mendocino County is in Eureka, downwind of the old PG&E plant.

A gamma ray detector and various filters will be installed at the district's monitoring station on top of Fort Bragg City Hall, according to City Manager Linda Ruffing.

"The new equipment does not provide any real-time data we can access — it transmits its data to one of the national labs that has the software to interpret it. We also will be shipping filters to the lab for detailed study," Brown said. "EPA staff feel that the risk is extremely low — however they are establishing these sites out of an abundance of caution."

With proven government fibs of the past weighing on local minds, several people were even testing the air on their own.

"Saturday. I had recorded 15 cpm, this is counts-per-minutes on a Geiger counter, said Jeremy James of Fort Bragg. "This is typical background radiation. Sunday afternoon I had a high of approximately 30 cpm. This was in a light rainfall."

James said the Geiger counter measures in milli/roentgens. It uses a Geiger-Müller tube to detect moderate and high energy beta radiation, and gamma radiation down to low energies.

"These levels are low and could be attributed to background radiation, but the confirmation of elevated levels that day comes from Berkeley University and a lab in Eureka. While I cannot measure decay rate, I can theorize that these are low levels of radio active iodine as I have found no buildup on the ground and radio active iodines

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decay rate is rather quick," said James.

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Many locals are getting a fast education in a previously unknown language of meltdowns, radiation levels and even nuclear physics.

Many more are left baffled and worried, even in light of the nearly universal assurances of no risk to California.

Mary Pat Palmer of The Philo School of Herbal Energetics is turning to seaweed, not radiation detectors.

"When our iodine levels are at a high [good] rate, we won't take up radioactive iodine, which is the form we would get. The safest, most consistent way is to eat seaweed on a regular basis which defends us over time, which seems to me the smart way to go since we don't really know when the drift will reach us," said Palmer.

Consuming potassium iodide pills can have serious side effects, health authorities warn.

Palmer said there is a way to test whether or not one has enough iodine in their system.

"To test the levels paint iodine [available at drugstores] on the inner arm. If it is absorbed within four to six hours, your levels are pretty good. If it takes 24 hours, it is a good idea to raise it," Palmer said. "People with hyperthyroid should be more careful about eating seaweed and raising their iodine levels than people with hypothyroid."

Eight of 18 air monitors in California, Oregon and Washington state that track radiation from Japan's nuclear reactors are "undergoing quality review," according to the Environmental Protection Agency's website. The U.S. has 124 stationary air-radiation monitors compared with 50 in use when the reactor at Chernobyl, Ukraine, exploded in 1986, Bloomberg reported.

Twenty-two monitors weren't working and were listed as out-of-service today, the Bloomberg report said.

- Mendocino County Community Health: www.co.mendocino.ca.us/hhsa/chs/newsalert.htm.

- U.C. Berkeley Nuclear Engineering Air Monitoring, <http://www.nuc.berkeley.edu/UCBAirSampling>.

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