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Radioactive Rain Falling on United States

East Coast tests found iodine-131 from Japan in rainwater; California results due out in coming days
By: [John Upton](#)

Rain falling on the United States contains radioactive material from Japan at levels that exceed federal safety thresholds.

Federal officials on Tuesday urged calm in the wake of the discovery of iodine-131, which blew across the Pacific Ocean from the stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant, in rainwater.

The tests that detected the radioactive material were conducted by the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) and by [nuclear power plant operators in Pennsylvania](#).



Test results for California have not yet been released, so it's impossible to assess the exact dangers here. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to publish those results within the next day or so, according to Mike Bandrowski, chief of indoor air and radiation for the EPA's Region 9, which includes California.

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Government officials for weeks have been [downplaying the likely health effects](#) of the radioactive fallout on Californians.

The level of radioactive material detected by the East Coast tests, however, “does exceed the EPA’s maximum contaminant level,” Bandrowski said. Because radioactive material degrades quickly, he said the contamination would likely be short-lived. “It’s all going to decay away in two months or so.”

Iodine-131 is among the most toxic particles released during nuclear accidents, according to Daniel Hirsch, a nuclear policy lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz. It can build up in thyroid glands, where it can lead to cancer.