

The New York Times Reprints

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)



March 14, 2011

Navy Says 17 Americans Were Treated for Contamination

By **THOM SHANKER**

WASHINGTON — American Navy officials in [Japan](#) said early Monday that 17 military personnel who had been aboard three helicopters assisting in the earthquake relief effort had been exposed to low levels of contamination.

Cmdr. Jeff A. Davis, a spokesman for the American Seventh Fleet in Japan, said the Navy personnel — who apparently had flown through a radioactive plume from a damaged nuclear power plant — had been ordered to dispose of their uniforms and to undergo a decontamination scrub that had successfully removed radioactive particles.

“They received very, very low levels of contamination,” Commander Davis said in a telephone interview from Japan early Monday.

“It certainly is not cause for alarm,” he said. “It is something we have to watch very carefully and make sure we are able to monitor, and to mitigate against this environmental hazard.”

The Navy personnel aboard the three helicopters had received the equivalent of one month’s natural background radiation from the sun, rocks or soil, he said.

The helicopter crew members had landed aboard the U.S.S. [Ronald Reagan](#), a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier whose on-board sensors had indicated that the warship, too, had been exposed to airborne contamination at very low levels. The helicopter crew members were tested individually with hand-held radiation monitors.

The carrier and its strike group were operating about 100 miles northeast of the damaged power plant at the time, but the helicopters had flown closer to assist in relief missions near Sendai, the city that bore much of the brunt of the tsunami after Friday’s earthquake.

The Ronald Reagan and other American warships have now sailed to areas where they will not be in the path of radiation carried in the wind.

“As a precautionary measure, U.S.S. Ronald Reagan and other U.S. Seventh Fleet ships conducting disaster-response operations in the area have moved out of the downwind direction from the site to assess the situation and determine what appropriate mitigating actions are necessary,” Commander David said.

But he stressed that the fleet remains “committed to our mission of providing assistance to the people of Japan.”