

The “3A” Club in Koriyama



Tokiko Noguchi (left), manager of the “3A” Club (in Japanese, safety, security and action –the alliteration is lost in translation !), spoke about what the club does, then Yokei Suzuki (right) spoke about his work with the club.

Tokiko told us that she and her daughter voluntarily evacuated from Koriyama when the authorities warned that radiation from the Fukushima Dai-ichi disaster was going to fall on Koriyama, 58 km from the nuclear site. She was told by people who remained in Koriyama that “the radiation fell as snow”. She and her daughter stayed with Tokiko’s parents for a month, before returning to Koriyama (partly because her daughter wanted to see her friends and return to her school). When she returned, all school pupils were told that they had to wear hats, gloves, long sleeves, and masks when walking to and from school, and all outside activities were banned. All windows in school were closed, and radiation monitors displayed the radiation count in the school playgrounds.

Tokiko and friends decided to start the “3A” club to do whatever they could to make living in the contaminated city of Koriyama safer for them and their families.

The centre’s activities include:

- Selling radiation free vegetables and bottled water – because they don’t trust the government or supermarkets, they source vegetables and bottled water from uncontaminated parts of Japan and sell them at cost to their members;



- Food testing – they have equipment setup to check radiation levels of any food. Results are collated, and show that radiation levels have fallen significantly in locally grown food, but are still above the safe levels;
- Voluntary medical check-ups – they offer thyroid, breast cancer, and blood tests to provide independent checks on official tests, and to test a wider subject group (in particular adults for thyroid cancer, as the government only tests children for thyroid cancer);
- Consultation with an independent doctor – monthly group and individual consultations with a doctor who also regularly travels to Belarus and the Ukraine to treat Chernobyl radiation victims;
- Radiation monitoring – the group has radiation monitors which members can borrow to check their own houses, and individual dosimeters which members can borrow (and see below for GPS mapping);
- Childrens’ summer camps – a chance for children to play unrestrictedly outdoors in areas of Japan that are free from radioactive contamination;
- Countering discrimination against residents of Fukushima – discrimination, particularly with regard to marriage partners, is becoming more and more of an issue;
- Mothers’ groups, fathers’ groups, information and press work, assisting with compensation claims.

Tokiko said that at school, the pupils are taught that about 1 out of 3 Japanese people die as a result of cancer, radiation occurs naturally in the environment, is used beneficially in medicine, and that nuclear power is necessary. Her daughter then challenges her as to why she is so worried about radiation.

Yokei Suzuki, a father of two (14 and 17 year olds) then spoke about his voluntary work with the centre. He too had voluntarily evacuated and then returned, and decided that his greatest contribution could be in mapping radioactive hot spots using the centre’s GPS equipped radiation monitor. In April 2011, when the official radiation readings were 2 μSv / hour, his readings suggested that the actual rate was 3 μSv / hour; he is firmly of the opinion that when the radiation

monitors were installed, the soil around the stand of the monitors was replaced by radioactively clean soil, resulting in lower radiation readings.

He showed us the map of Koriyama park, after it had been decontaminated and deemed to be safe for children to play in. His map shows all the hot spots that he and his team had located. They pass this information on to the city council, but they are slow to respond due to their backlog of work.



He also explained how they carry out “do it yourself” decontamination: initially they would just cleaned an area using pressure water spraying, which usually halved the radiation levels, but just moved the radioactive particles into the waste water system. Now they use a mixture of mild acid and detergent, spray and brush the area, then vacuum up the liquid and store it in large plastic barrels. Because the authorities won’t collect liquid radioactive waste, they then seal these barrels and store them in their gardens; when the weather is hot, they unseal the barrels to allow the water to evaporate, and eventually the residue is collected by the authorities as contaminated soil.

“Most fathers have a job which gives them some status”, he said, “and our culture tends to suppress discussion of worries, especially radiation worries. But our children are our most important job”.

He also said that some parents don’t want to know about the radiation levels, as they want to believe the government when they say that the situation is safe.