

A MESSAGE FROM MRS. MINAKO SUGANO



Minako Sugano,
mother of three
children, and a former
kindergarten teacher
in Date City.

I am Minako Sugano, a mother of three from Yanagawa Town, Date City, in Fukushima Prefecture.

On June 30, 2011, Oguni District in the town of Ryozen, Date City was designated as a specific zone recommended for evacuation; we opted to evacuate on the 3rd of July. I still have many doubts about how the evacuation process was handled. I was alerted of the evacuation designation in the form of a “notification regarding the setting of specific zones recommended for evacuation” that was issued to all persons subject to this designation.

“In the Oguni District where you reside, it is not estimated that the overall one-year accumulated radiation dosage since the incident occurred will exceed 20mSv. However, it cannot be denied that the air dose rate could potentially exceed 20mSV at the residence and neighborhood where you reside.”

A survey was also included. The right had been established to evacuate based on measurements conducted in just two places; the area around the front door within the grounds of the house, and in the centre of the lawn. Despite holding residents' association meetings, signing petitions, and tendering requests, not once was the opinion of residents asked for. With none of our concerns resolved or addressed, evacuation began. Everyday was full of worry; we had no idea when the evacuation order would be lifted.

I had thought that in the event of evacuation being designated, the city or the government would respond in line with the demands of residents. As a citizen, part of me had faith in Date City, that it would carry out measurements, explanations, and consultation sessions ... but that was a foolish expectation.

On November 28, 2012, a letter arrived. It contained a notification entitled “Regarding the implementation of a thorough environmental radiation monitoring investigation” as well as the notification “regarding the lifting of designated specific evacuation zones”, which stated that the evacuation order would be lifted in the event that it is confirmed that the level is unmistakably below 20mSv.

They came to do measurement on the 5th of the following month, and just as I was thinking that there would be explanation sessions to respond case-by-case to

individual measurement results . . . on the morning of the 14th I learned from the Internet and on daily news that the designation had been lifted; I was so shocked that I could not move.

I was then extremely surprised the next day when the postman delivered a notification regarding the lifting of designation of specific zones recommended for evacuation. Inside was a letter from the mayor explaining that Date City had received notification from the Nuclear Disaster Emergency Headquarters about the lifting of the designation of specific zones recommended for evacuation. There were also photocopies of the notifications from the Nuclear Disaster Emergency Headquarters and the town.

After that I got on the telephone, went in person to the city office to demand the reason for the lifting of the designation and to assert that there were still high levels of radiation despite contamination efforts, but was given the brush off. On top of all this, I asked "So we should just be extra careful for the next 30 years then, should we?" to which they simply bowed their heads and apologised. I realised that at this rate I might have to return to my home, and began talking things over with my family to get our plan straight. We decided to remain in the place we evacuated to...

Although the children are evacuated, they still commute to schools in high-dose radiation areas, and as of last year one of my children started elementary school. I tried to organise a transfer to another school and then to buy land and a house, but due to being in the fourth year of my mortgage there were restrictions and conditions on how much I could borrow, so I am going nowhere fast with this. Just as I was proceeding with applying for national aid available in the form of a disaster restoration housing loan, I discovered that the evacuation order had been lifted, meaning I no longer qualified for this aid.

All of a sudden, the evacuation order gets lifted. People suddenly have to make a move. There are no grace periods, explanation sessions or consultations. It never occurred to me that I would be forced to return to a high radiation-dose area on the back of just one case of decontamination and measurement. I am trying to improve my situation now, but am not making the slightest progress.

Compensation payments finished at the end of March. Now I am autonomously evacuated. Although we still receive compensation from my husband's work, we never know how long it will last. It is taxed, and after income tax, enterprise tax, town and prefectural taxes it is nearly all gone so I can barely bring myself to open the statement when it arrives. Why do we have to live with this everyday anxiety, relying on compensation payments?

On top of all of this, most of the compensation payments are eaten up by tax. So, does that mean we have to return to the high radiation dose house that we left? I want to protect my children. What kind of parents knowingly take their kids into a place that they know is dangerous?

My feeling remains the same: despite the lifting of the designation of evacuation, I want all of the households with children in the Oguni District to be evacuated.

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