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Al-Jazeera America on the Fukushima Triple Disaster, Three Years On

アルジャジーラ・アメリカが報じる福島トリプル災害 三年目

David McNeill

As the third anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster approaches, a string of new projects analyzing its causes and impact are underway. Al-Jazeera America is among the first out of the blocks with a four-part documentary, broadcast on its "America Tonight" segment in early January 2014. Among the questions it explores in the video below: Does the lingering aftermath of the crisis pose any danger to people living on the West Coast of North America?

The documentary concludes that it does not. "The radiation will slowly sink, before harmlessly decaying over decades as Pacific currents turn most of the groundwater toward Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean," says Professor Aoyama Michio, a scientist at the Meteorological Institute of Japan. But, he adds, operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) must remove all the Strontium-90 from contaminated water or it will cause a "big problem" for the whole Pacific.

Compiled during two weeks of November 2013, the documentary's most damning report profiles the so-called nuclear gypsies, the largely unskilled, non-unionized and transient workforce that TEPCO has employed, through a network of subcontractors, to clean up from the disaster. In contrast to its regular employees, many are paid less than \$100 a day. Conditions are poor and concern for their safety is lax. When the workers have reached their radiation limit, they are discarded, say the program's producers.

The documentary also questions the vast, expensive project to decontaminate an area the size of Connecticut. The project has created mountains of radioactive waste, scattered in dumps around the prefecture. Radiation is still high even in areas that have already been cleaned. Yakuza gangs have siphoned off much of the budget. Residents interviewed in the documentary say they will never return. But Sakurai Katsunobu, the mayor of Minamisōma, believes no good comes from agonizing over the past. "I just focus on how to move the city forward into the future."

Most remarkably, perhaps, America Tonight concludes that the Fukushima disaster has had little if any impact on [Japan Inc.](#)'s plans to sell nuclear technology abroad. The business of nuclear power may well grow in the coming years, and Japan is attempting to position itself at the front of the business pack with bids to build plants in Vietnam and the Middle East, among others.

[The Nuclear Gypsies Cleaning Up Fukushima Part One \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

David McNeill writes for [The Independent](#) and other publications, including [The Irish Times](#), [The Economist](#) and [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#). He is an Asia-Pacific Journal coordinator and coauthor of [Strong in the Rain: Surviving Japan's Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

His January 15, 2014 appearance on Amy Goodman's radio show Democracy Now! is [here](#).

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