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### Radiation Checker: the gift that keeps on giving

By Abby Luby

Hand held Geiger Counters for the layperson has become essential since the nuclear disaster at Fukushima in March, 2011. Radiation is odorless and invisible, yet lethal in large doses. Soon after Fukushima the Japanese created a sleek-lined Geiger counter that plugs into your iPhone and instantly reveals radiation levels,empowering knowledge, especially if you live near aging plants like Indian Point, just 24 miles from NYC

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Guess what I got tucked in to my holiday stocking?

A brand new, sleek-lined Geiger counter that plugs in to your iPhone or iPad and within seconds detects radiation levels. It was the gift that topped my list - with its pencil-like probe (14 centimeters long) that plugs in to the iPhone and uses a special app called "Geiger Bot." My second choice for Christmas was the Geiger Camera app; same idea but works via the phone camera.

<http://techcrunch.com/2011/11/16/geiger-fukushima-radiation-and-geiger-counter-for-the-iphone/>

To easily check radiation levels right in our own backyard is more than a curious pastime. It's a survival check that became imperative last March for hundreds of thousands of Japanese who lived near the TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear power plants, reactors crippled by an earthquake and tsunami. The dual disasters ultimately caused a triple meltdown that released dangerously high levels of radioactive substances. Today, almost ten months later, Fukushima will go down in history as the worst nuclear disaster since the Chrenobyl meltdown in 1986.

In the post Fukushima aftermath, the Japanese company, Sanwa, came up with "Geiger Fukushima" -- a name somewhat off-putting but leaves no doubt what this portable and light apparatus is for. This radiation detector and many other portable Geiger counters are nifty, geeky gadgets that let you outfit yourself with glitzy, high-tech survival gear replete with a not-so-subtle doomsday overtone. "Geiger Fukushima" is a perfect gift for someone like me living just a few miles from the aging Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant in Westchester, New York; the twin reactors were built in the 1970's just 24 miles from New York City and are known to routinely and accidentally release radioactive plumes into the atmosphere and leak radioactive isotopes into the Hudson River.

Truly, these "smart" radiation detectors are the type of gift that keeps on giving.

If you decide to own such accoutrements as a pocket Geiger Counter, you will not be an anomaly: you can belong to the growing grass roots Radiation Monitoring Network ([www.RadiationNetwork.com](http://www.RadiationNetwork.com)) whose data is available to anyone in the

U.S. and around the world. You yourself can contribute to the group's National Radiation Map where members have set up networks of stations that monitor radiation levels in real time. These high-tech tools and cyber networks are not only essential, they are empowering.

"Impacts of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plants on Marine Radioactivity," a report in mid-December, 2011, confirmed that levels of radioactive cesium and strontium-90 reached 50 million times the normal levels in the ocean near Fukushima. Working on the study was the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Japanese Meteorological Research Institute and the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology. [http://www.opednews.com/populum/\(http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/12/111209171940.htm\)](http://www.opednews.com/populum/(http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/12/111209171940.htm))

In the months following Fukushima, multiple studies weighed in on how much radiation actually poisoned the areas surrounding the Dai-Ichi plants and then wafted out to sea. In a report a few weeks ago by Hong Kong-Based environmental consultant Yoichi Shimatsu ("The Death Of The Pacific Ocean Fukushima Debris Soon To Hit American Shores" 12-16-11 <http://www.rense.com/general95/death.htm>), he estimates that "radioactive isotopes cesium and strontium are by now in the

marine food chain, moving up the bio-ladder from plankton to invertebrates like squid and then into fish like salmon and halibut." Shimatsu is clear about the critical interdependence between sea animals and land events: how aquatic life after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami were exposed to millions of tons of what could be contaminated biological waste that made its way to the ocean from nearby farms. Other volatile chemical compounds can evaporate and form clouds unleashing rain over Canada and northern United States, extending a long term threat beyond the Rockies "affecting agriculture, rivers, reservoirs and eventually aquifers and well water."

How much radiation has reached the United States?

It depends on who you talk to. Reliable reporting on the spread of radiation from Fukushima can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Government officials from Japan and the United States are skeptical of any real danger from Fukushima borne radiation. Immediately after the Fukushima disaster, the Japanese government neglected to act on data showing the enormity of radioactive plumes and failed to safely evacuate residents, exposing entire towns to harmful radiation. The Japanese government's denial of widespread contamination justified their

evacuate residents, exposing entire towns to harmful radiation. The Japanese government's denial of widespread contamination justified their minimal effort to effectively contain spillage from the plants to the Pacific; they even approved sea-dumping of nuclear and chemical waste from Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was no better saying that most of the radioactive water from Fukushima released into the Pacific was harmless, and that nuclear sea-dumping would have no deleterious impact on the environment because radioactive isotopes would sink into the middle of the ocean.

Does this mind-set sound familiar?

Think the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission who is emphatic about how Indian Point has little impact on the Hudson River, incanting the NRC mantra "Dilution is the solution to pollution."

The NRC response to Fukushima was equally disappointing. They hand-picked a five-member safety task force in October who later recommended seven safety actions to be enforced in U.S. nuclear power plants. But later in December the Commission did an about face and reserved the right to reject any safety upgrades the NRC staff chose to implement. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a new regulatory requirement by the NRC staff can be deemed non-essential by the Commission unless the requirement passes a cost-benefit test -- a test the UCS says is based on a "post-Fukushima understanding of risk." ("NRC's Post-Fukushima Response: Going in Circles"  
<http://allthingsnuclear.org/post/14624150915/nrcs-post-fukushima-response-going-in-circles>)

Radioactive releases happen on a routine basis - no surprise here and if you live near a nuclear power plant. But many aging plants are accident prone. In February, 2000, reactor unit 2 at the Entergy owned Indian Point experienced a ruptured steam generator tube that released 20,000 gallons of radioactive coolant into the plant and then into the atmosphere, causing the plant to close for ten months. Indian Point's spent fuel pools have been leaking into the groundwater and tainting the Hudson River where four species of fish were tested positive for the radioactive isotope strontium-90.

In 2010, the Radiation and Public Health Project reported on the staggering rise of cancer cases near Indian Point over 15 years and strongly suggested that radiation exposure from the plant was the cause. RPHP used data from the New York State Cancer Registry (for county cancer rates) and from the National Cancer Institute (for national cancer rates). Over a 5-year period there were about 9,000 residents diagnosed with cancer each year.  
[http://www.radiation.org/reading/pubs/101118\\_IndianPointreport.pdf](http://www.radiation.org/reading/pubs/101118_IndianPointreport.pdf).

Knowing that invisible and odorless radiation could be lurking in our garden soil is better than not knowing at all. We don't need a major nuclear disaster to own small, hand-held Geiger counters and iPhone apps -- just living near a nuclear power plant is reason enough. Protecting ourselves and our community seems to be one way around unresponsive government agencies whose alleged claim is to protect the public's health and safety.

#### **Submitters Bio:**

Abby Luby is a freelance journalist who has covered the Indian Point nuclear power plant in New York for over ten years, and the author of the new ebook "A Nuclear Romance." This novel is about living near a nuclear power plant in New York. Her articles on Indian Point appear in The New York Daily News, The Westchester Guardian, The North County News. She also writes for The Poughkeepsie Journal, The Stamford Advocate/Greenwich Time. As a regular contributor to Valley Table Magazine and the Hearst publications HealthyLiving, Living [at] Home and Roll Magazine, she also writes about hard news, food, health articles and art. She teaches writing and literature at Marist College.

[Back](#)