

Radiation leaks announced in Japan

These are still "dangerous leaks" in a media sense.

CNN (Associated Press)
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A Tokyo research facility accidentally released slightly radioactive wastewater into a public drain, while water containing a small amount of radiation leaked on two separate occasions at a nuclear power plant in western Japan, officials said Friday.

Researchers at pharmaceutical company Seikagaku Corp. failed to shut off a tap in a laboratory on Wednesday, causing a tank of radioactive wastewater to overflow into a local drainage pipe, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology said.

The approximately 10,000 liters (2,600 gallons) of water released into the drainpipe contained only small amounts of radiation and did not pose a health or environmental hazard, the ministry said in a statement.

Company officials reported the incident after a security guard raised the alarm early Thursday, the ministry said. No workers were injured, according to a separate statement by Seikagaku. The company was ordered to temporarily stop experiments involving radioactive material, improve safety procedures at its labs and submit a report by early December, it said.

Seikagaku uses radioactive isotopes to develop a wide range of drugs, said company spokeswoman Mikako Torii.

The two leaks at Unit 1 of the Tsuruga Nuclear Power Station, about 320 kilometers (200 miles) northwest of Tokyo, were discovered during regular inspections earlier this month, Japan Atomic Power Co. said in a statement. Radiation did not leak outside the unit in both incidents, and no workers were exposed, according to company spokeswoman Miki Yamamoto.

Inspectors found about 300 milliliters (0.08 gallon) of cooling water seeping out of a condensate pump on November 12, while another 30-liter (8-gallon) leak was discovered near a separate supply pump in the same building the next day, the statement said.

The radiation leak involved in both instances was "minuscule," much lower than the level at which nuclear power plants must inform the government under Japanese law, Yamamoto said.

The unit stopped operating on November 12 for regular inspections and was set to restart on schedule at the end of December, Yamamoto said.

The incidents came after a similar leak in September forced the Tsuruga unit to temporarily reduce reactor output. The company was still investigating the causes of all three leaks, Yamamoto said.

Japan's government has been aggressively pushing nuclear power to meet the energy needs of the resource-poor country, but public trust has been badly shaken by a series of safety violations, reactor malfunctions and accidents.

In August 2004, a corroded cooling pipe carrying boiling water and superheated steam burst at another reactor in western Japan, killing five workers. No radiation was released in that accident.