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Friday February 23, 2001

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| **Navy, Japanese disagree on whether dioxin levels near Atsugi are acceptable**  ***By*** [***Fred Knapp***](mailto:knappf@mail.pstripes.osd.mil) ***Stars and Stripes*** |

Navy officials are disputing Japanese claims that an incinerator outside Atsugi Naval Air Facility, Japan, has cleaned up its act.

Japan’s Ministry of Environment announced Tuesday that new filters at the Enviro-Tech incinerator had cut toxic emissions to acceptable levels.

Ministry official Kiyoshi Iwasaki said daily average concentrations of dioxin ranged from .20 to .49 picograms per cubic meter of air at three different monitoring sites near the incinerator. The Japanese standard calls for no more than 0.6 picograms, or trillionths of a gram. The testing was completed during a three-month period starting April 1, 2000.

Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Graybeal, spokesman for Commander of Naval Forces Japan, acknowledged that dioxin levels had fallen at the base, but said that in the monitoring period, the 0.6-picogram standard had been exceeded on 21 days at the base’s ground electronics maintenance office about 300 yards north of the incinerator.

At a housing area about 250 yards northwest of the incinerator, the standard was exceeded on one day, he added. One reading between March 11 and April 1 reached 6.9 picograms, he said.

Data since June show a trend back toward higher dioxin levels, Graybeal said, adding that the data, collected jointly by the United States and Japan, will be released in the coming weeks.

Dioxin levels above 50 picograms, about 90 times the standard, were recorded in 1999, before new filters were installed in early 2000.

The U.S. Navy filed a lawsuit last March, asking the Kanagawa Prefecture to order Enviro-Tech to stop using the incinerator. U.S. officials will continue the lawsuit, Graybeal said.

"The United States will not consider this matter resolved until the incinerator’s operations have been halted, or a stack of sufficient height has been constructed, as promised in May, 1999 by the Japanese prime minister," Graybeal said.

The current smokestack is about 90 feet and rises from the incinerator in a depression, leaving its top just above the base ground level.

In 1999, the Japanese government budgeted about $10 million to build a stack about 330 feet to disperse the emissions. But the company suspended construction negotiations with the Japanese government last year in a dispute over conditions, including the government’s insistence that it, not the company, would own the stack.

"We regret that no action has yet been taken" by the Japanese government to fulfill the commitment to build the taller stack, which was to have been ready by next month, Graybeal said.

The Japanese government is still negotiating with Enviro-Tech, a spokesman for the Japan Defense Facilities Administration Agency said Thursday. The government is making all efforts to realize the plan, but because the company must agree, it is taking time, he said.

Meanwhile, the government is limiting the incinerator to processing 30 tons of garbage per day, the spokesman said.

Graybeal said that while the plant has three incinerators, only two were working during the period reflected in the monitoring data. And he said incinerator owner/operator Tetsuro Murata sometimes bypasses the filters that have been installed on the plant, citing photos dated in June that showed black smoke pouring from one of the stacks.

"He’s still operating the plant in a way that’s dangerous to the health of our sailors," Graybeal said.

An Enviro-Tech spokesman called the statement that the plant sometimes bypasses the filters "outrageous," while declining to comment on the status of the smokestack construction project.

The spokesman declined comment on the smoke in the photo cited by Graybeal, citing ongoing litigation over the incinerator.

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