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Adequacy of EPA radiation monitoring system called into question

By [Eartha Jane Melzer](#) | 04.06.11 | 10:18 am

Data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's network of radiation monitors does not reach the public quickly and some monitors are not functional, critics say.

"The monitoring system isn't functioning fully," Daniel Hirsch, a lecturer on nuclear policy at the University of California Santa Cruz told [WTVM.com](#).

Hirsch said that EPA is far too slow in sharing data about the radiation that is moving across the country from the nuclear accident in Japan and some of RadNet's monitoring systems have been offline for months awaiting repairs.

The Associated Press (AP) reported Saturday that of the 124 fixed monitors used by the EPA, "about 20" were out of service last week. On Monday, that number dropped to 10, according to the EPA's website. By Wednesday, eight were off line.

However, according to the EPA's website, of those 124 monitors, 38 percent were listed as "under review" Wednesday – a slight improvement over Monday's 40 percent figure.

A spokeswoman with the EPA said monitors are placed under review any time a monitor detects readings "outside typical background fluctuations." The EPA reviews the incoming data to ensure its accuracy before it makes the data available to the public online.

Hirsch called [elevated levels of iodine-131](#) in rain "a red flag" for public health and said that he is concerned that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which has less stringent radiation exposure guidelines, has superseded the EPA in US response activities.

He said the public has been told that the radiation levels detected in the U.S. are a small fraction of "permissible" levels. But those levels are judged against emergency levels assigned to areas in close proximity to nuclear power plants, not to areas with no known risk to radiation, he says.

Hirsch compares the current radiation scare to last year's BP oil spill. At first, the public was told that there was not much leakage from the rig, when in reality, millions of gallons were pouring into the Gulf of Mexico.

Hirsch said the radiation is "more harmful" to human beings, and called the crisis "nuclear BP cubed."

He supports legal action in order to address what he says are problems with the EPA's radiation monitoring system.

“I think there needs to be a Congressional investigation of the failure of the EPA monitoring system,” he said.

This week EPA [announced](#) that radioactive iodine-131 was detected in drinking water samples taken last week in Boise, Idaho and Richland, Washington.

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