

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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JUNE 7, 2011

Japan's Exporters Test for Radiation

TOKYO—Since the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear crisis, many global consumers have equated "Made in Japan" with "potentially radioactive," hurting business across the country.



Reuters

A certified radiation protection supervisor conducts a radiation screening on a shipping container at the port in Yokohama, Japan.

That has fueled a boom in demand for radiation-testing equipment from exporters, such as [Toyota Motor Corp.](#) and [Fujitsu Ltd.](#), seeking to reassure overseas clients that their cars, computers and other products are safe.

Nippon Kaiji Kentei Kyokai, which conducts safety inspections of marine cargo, has received more

dozen or so such orders a month. The company barely has been able to keep up with orders and inquiries from Japanese manufacturers, trading houses and shipping companies.

Inquiries for a [Hitachi Ltd.](#) unit that makes radiation measuring devices have surged since the March 11 earthquake and nuclear accident. The company expects orders for this fiscal year to be about seven times higher than usual, held back by limited supply. The company has expanded production and hopes it can increase deliveries soon.

"It has been overwhelming," says Koichi Yamada, a manager at [Hitachi Aloka Medical Ltd.](#) He said exaggerated perceptions more than actual danger are fueling demand.

"Japan looks so tiny on the world map, so some people outside Japan may be wondering if the whole country is contaminated, even though that's not the case," Mr. Yamada says.

Radiation measuring devices take up a small portion of the medical-equipment maker's overall business, but the company still is the field's biggest player in Japan, with 38% of the market.

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found only in limited parts of Fukushima Prefecture.

The Japanese government evacuated residents from the roughly 12-mile radius of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and from some towns and villages outside the radius where radiation readings indicated relatively serious contamination.

In areas relatively distant from the nuclear plant, the public's fears about contamination revolve more around food, as authorities have found higher-than-permissible levels of radioactivity in various types of farm and fishery products.

Experts say it is highly unlikely for any industrial products, even those manufactured at plants in Fukushima, to be unsafe.

"We can basically assume that the industrial products currently shipped out are safe," says Naoya Inoue, professor of physics at Saitama University. Even if the area's airborne radiation is higher than usual, the levels inside factory buildings are much lower than outside, he says.

Geiger counters and other survey meters are commonly used to detect relatively low-level radiation. The ones from Hitachi Aloka typically sell for around ¥300,000 to ¥500,000, roughly \$3,500 to \$6,000. Smaller, less accurate meters are available for less than ¥100,000. A highly specialized device typically used to detect radioactivity in food costs around ¥15 million yen.

Dosimeters, small devices that look like pedometers, are used to measure cumulative exposure to radiation, and usually sell for around ¥30,000. Workers at nuclear plants typically wear or carry them in pockets.

The devices measure radiation, which is invisible

a tiny market, estimated at around ¥16 billion in Japan. Orders came mainly from nuclear power plants, university laboratories using radioactive isotopes and hospitals performing CT scans and X-rays.

Urgent demand for gathering radiation data now comes from a whole new set of customers. Government agencies have ramped up monitoring of air, soil, water and food. So, too, have many Japanese manufacturers—particularly exporters—checking their products for radiation before shipping, to comply with regulations at their destinations and to eliminate concerns of overseas clients, even if they're not well-founded.

Toyota has been conducting radiation tests at all the three ports in central Japan from where its cars are shipped overseas. "Our factories are all far away from the nuclear plant, but we want to make sure to address any concerns that our overseas customers may have," says spokeswoman Shiori Hashimoto.

The majority of the auto maker's domestic factories are in central Japan, more than 250 miles away from the Fukushima Daiichi plant. Toyota's closest plant to Fukushima is 70 miles away.

Honda Motor Corp. also checks its cars shipped out of four Japanese ports.

The Japan Automobile Manufacturing Association trade group in April said the industry voluntarily is testing cars for radiation, saying it is "aware of the need for consumers everywhere to be assured."

Some electronics companies also are conducting radiation tests to assure customers. Fujitsu has been testing airborne radiation levels at some of its production facilities across Japan and has obtained equipment to test products. "We are making sure that our manufacturing facilities and

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