

Radioactivity's danger overstated?

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Studies of some of the worst radiation incidents show effects on workers and residents aren't nearly as severe as commonly thought, a German newspaper said.

From the dropping of U.S. atomic bombs on Japan in World War II to a 1957 accident at a secret nuclear facility in Siberia to German uranium mines to the nuclear radiation release at Chernobyl in 1987, researchers are finding long-term dangers seem overblown, Der Spiegel reported Friday.

Instead of tens of thousands of deaths from those incidents, documented cancer and other radiation-related deaths have been only in the hundreds, the German newspaper said. Research shows health-related problems, including genetic deformities, also were overstated.

The research includes work done by GSF Research Center for Health and the Environment in Neuherberg, Germany -- Europe's largest radiation protection institute -- for the European Union's Southern Urals Radiation Risk Research project, and by the U.S. National Cancer Institute, as well as a U.S.-Japanese epidemiological study.

"For commendable reasons, many critics have greatly exaggerated the health risks of radioactivity," Albrecht Kellerer, a Munich radiation biologist, told the newspaper. "But contrary to widespread opinion, the number of victims is by no means in the tens of thousands."

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