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573 deaths 'related to nuclear crisis'

The Yomiuri Shimbun

A total of 573 deaths have been certified as "disaster-related" by 13 municipalities affected by the crisis at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey.

This number could rise because certification for 29 people remains pending while further checks are conducted.

The 13 municipalities are three cities--Minami-Soma, Tamura and Iwaki--eight towns and villages in Futaba County--Namie, Futaba, Okuma, Tomioka, Naraha, Hirono, Katsurao and Kawauchi--and Kawamata and Iitate, all in Fukushima Prefecture.

These municipalities are in the no-entry, emergency evacuation preparation or expanded evacuation zones around the nuclear plant, which suffered meltdowns soon after the March 11 disaster.

A disaster-related death certificate is issued when a death is not directly caused by a tragedy, but by fatigue or the aggravation of a chronic disease due to the disaster. If a municipality certifies the cause of death is directly associated to a disaster, a condolence grant is paid to the victim's family. If the person was a breadwinner, 5 million yen is paid.

Applications for certification have been filed for 748 people, and 634 of them have been cleared to undergo screening.

Of the 634, 573 deaths were certified as disaster-related, 28 applications were rejected, four cases had to reapply because of flawed paperwork, and 29 remain pending.

In Minami-Soma, a screening panel of doctors, lawyers and other experts examined 251 applications and approved 234 of them. The panel judged two deaths were not eligible for certification and 15 were put on hold.

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"During our examination of the applications, we gave emphasis to the conditions at evacuation sites and how they spent their days before they died," a city government official said. "However, the screening process was difficult in cases when people had stayed in evacuation facilities for an extended time and when there was little evidence of where they had been taking shelter."

(Feb. 5, 2012)

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