U.S. Sailors Sue Japanese Utility Over Radiation

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Nearly 80 U.S. sailors are seeking $1 billion from the Tokyo utility that operates the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, alleging the company lied about the high level of radiation in the area where they were carrying out a humanitarian mission after a tsunami that touched off a nuclear crisis three years ago.

A lawsuit filed in federal court in San Diego contends that Tokyo Electric Power Co. repeatedly said there was no danger to the crew when they were actually being blanketed with radiation that has since led to dozens of cancer cases and a child being born with birth defects, the Orange County Register newspaper reported Monday (http://bit.ly/PGRNQm). The Japanese company says its "wholly implausible" military commanders would rely on safety information from the utility.

This is the second time the sailors have targeted the utility, the newspaper reported. Their 2012 suit was dismissed because it named the Japanese government, which owns the utility, and a judge said that put it beyond the reach of a U.S. court. An amended suit names only the utility, which runs the plant where three reactors went into meltdown and exploded in March 2011, sending radiation into the air.

The 79 sailors served on the San Diego-based aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which was ferrying food and water to the city of Sendai in the wake of a massive earthquake that triggered the tsunami.

In a motion to dismiss the new lawsuit, the Tokyo utility said that there was no way the commanders of the aircraft carrier would have relied on the utility to determine the safety of its sailors.

"It's wholly implausible," the company says in its response, "that military commanders in charge of thousands of personnel and armed with some of the world's most sophisticated equipment, relied instead only on the press releases and public statements of a foreign electric utility company."

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