

What about the radioactive cloud?

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It is like getting alarmed about a tornado when there is a breeze outside. This puts into perspective the concern that Italians have about the arrival in Europe, of the Japanese “radioactive cloud”.

This was the explanation give by the experts at the **JRC in Ispra**, the European centre on Lake Maggiore, which monitors many environmental situations, including radioactivity, for the whole European Community.

“We give technical and scientific support to the radiation protection unit of the Director General of Energy, based in Luxembourg. For them, we develop systems for exchanging international information in the environmental radioactivity sector,” explains **Marc De Cort**, the head of the service. “First of all, there is a routine, daily part: the member states are obliged to send us what they measure in the environment continuously, in accordance with a regulation from the Euratom treaty. We process the data in the REM (Radioactivity Environmental Monitoring) database: the member states send the data, we check it and produce an annual report; this is when the situation is normal, of course.”

Obviously, in the event of an emergency, the laboratory also has support systems. “It is called **ECURIE** (European Community Urgent Radiological Information Exchange). This is the official system of the European Commission. which member states must use if they want to adopt countermeasures to protect the people when there is an increase in radioactivity in the environment,” De Cort continues. “**The system is usually activated by the member state when necessary**, so that it can adopt measures to safeguard the people, which the appropriate authorities decide upon. In this case, the states are obliged to inform the European organisation. **And, for the moment, no one has done this: primarily because there is no reason** to adopt safety measures. The activity is so small that it is almost impossible to measure, and there certainly will not be any effects on health in these areas.”

But why has a “cloud” been mentioned? “Because, in fact, we can measure something, and this allows us to define the measured quantity a “cloud.” But this measurement can only be made using sophisticated equipment, because the measurement threshold is very low.”

This fact is confirmed by the **EURDEP** (European Radiological Data Exchange Platform) map, which is continually updated on line, which shows and monitors radioactivity throughout Europe. Today, 24 March 2011, the map shows a series of blue and green dots, which means that the level of radioactivity is very low. “EURDEP

is a monitoring system for emergencies, which provides information on the European situation in the event of a nuclear accident. This is the situation we can see at the moment. And the dots indicating low radioactivity depend on natural environmental factors, like ordinary weather conditions, for example.”

If you would personally like to check the situation over the next few days, just visit the website <http://eurdep.jrc.ec.europa.eu>, and click on “**EURDEP public map**”.

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redazione@varesenews.it