

Japan Tests Cars for Radiation

By YOSHIO TAKAHASHI

TOKYO—The Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association said Monday that the country's auto makers have started testing their vehicles for radiation prior to shipments to domestic and overseas markets, in a bid to mitigate concerns among customers about purchasing Japan-made products due to the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.



A worker checks a new vehicle's radiation levels at a Nissan Motor warehouse in Sanyo, Japan.

The move comes on the heels of increasing import restrictions on Japanese products. A total of 29 countries and regions have suspended or tightened controls on agricultural and dairy product imports as well as processed foods from Japan.

Japanese shipping company Mitsui O.S.K. Lines Ltd. 9104.TO -0.74% said in late March that its container ship had to head back to Japan, after Chinese authorities claimed to detect high levels of radiation from the vessel. China detected radiation worth 3.5 microsieverts per hour, compared to a radiation dose of around 100 microsieverts to which a chest X-ray typically exposes a patient.

The automobile division of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said it hasn't received reports from any foreign countries on introducing similar suspensions or strict measures on vehicles built and imported from Japan.

Still, a JAMA spokeswoman said Japanese car makers have received queries from customers at home and abroad about the safety of vehicles built in Japan.

The association, which represents 14 Japanese car, truck and motorcycle makers including Toyota Motor Corp., TM -0.52% said radiation levels recorded around production sites of Japanese car makers and ports from where vehicles are exported don't represent any threat to human health.

The tests implemented by the auto association show results that fall within the range designated by the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan as being unthreatening to human health, based on the daily readings performed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in every prefecture since March 25, the auto association said.

Its test results are also lower than the maximum allowable limit recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency, JAMA said.

"JAMA is fully confident in the safety of all motor vehicles manufactured in Japan. At the same time, it is aware of the need for consumers everywhere to be assured of such safety," Toshiyuki Shiga, chairman of the association, said in a statement.

For vehicles for export, each car maker tests about 10 vehicles at ports for radiation per ship with the capacity to carry about 5,000 vehicles on average, the JAMA spokeswoman said.

Japan exported half of a total of 9.63 million vehicles produced in the country in 2010, according to JAMA. By destination, Japan exported the biggest volume of 1.73 million vehicles to North America.

Similar tests are being conducted for vehicles for the domestic market, the JAMA spokeswoman said.