

Fukushima earthquake triggers thesis topic

October 11 2013

When Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred in March 2011, Aaron Chester had the opportunity of a lifetime to put his chemistry research skills to the test.

He had been looking for a research subject before the earthquake and tsunami damaged Fukushima's [nuclear facility](#), and the event triggered his master's thesis research topic—an analysis of Iodine-131 levels in B.C. rainwater and seaweed samples.

Working with colleagues from Krzysztof Starosta's research group at SFU, he captured information revealing there was no danger to the B.C. public.

He then compared the information to radiation levels experienced in B.C. after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, and to releases from Fukushima observed elsewhere in the world.

"It was a great educational experience for me," says Chester, a native of Michigan. "I had the opportunity to do some work in the public's interest and develop professionally."

In addition to developing environmental expertise and techniques, Chester was surprised to see the amount of public interest and response.

"Nuclear issues are often quite loaded and require both technical and scientific knowledge and political and communications skills," says chemistry professor Kris Starosta, Chester's supervisor. "He learned all

those skills and handled many delicate situations skillfully."

Published in the *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*, Chester was recognized for his work with the Anthony J. MacKay Student Paper Contest award from the Canadian Radiation Protection Association.

Chester, who convokes Oct. 11 with a MSc. degree, is pursuing doctoral studies in nuclear science at SFU.

More information: www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-environmental-radioactivity/

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