

[朝日新聞デジタル Japanese](#) [朝日新聞中文网 Chinese](#) [Asahi Asia Antenna - 독자와 함께 Korean](#)

CROOKED CLEANUP (1): Radioactive waste dumped into rivers during decontamination work in Fukushima

January 04, 2013

2

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Cleanup crews in Fukushima Prefecture have dumped soil and leaves contaminated with radioactive fallout into rivers. Water sprayed on contaminated buildings has been allowed to drain back into the environment. And supervisors have instructed workers to ignore rules on proper collection and disposal of the radioactive waste.

Decontamination is considered a crucial process in enabling thousands of evacuees to return to their homes around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and resume their normal lives.

But the decontamination work witnessed by a team of Asahi Shimbun reporters shows that contractual rules with the Environment Ministry have been regularly and blatantly ignored, and in some cases, could violate environmental laws.

"If the reports are true, it would be extremely regrettable," Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato said at his first news conference of the year on Jan. 4. "I hope everyone involved will clearly understand how important decontamination is to the people of Fukushima."

He called on the Environment Ministry to investigate and present a clear report to the prefectural government.

The shoddy practices may also raise questions about the decontamination program itself--and the huge amounts of money pumped into the program.

The central government initially set aside 650 billion yen (\$7.4 billion) to decontaminate areas hit by radioactive substances from the March 11, 2011, accident at the Fukushima plant. Since last summer, the Environment Ministry has designated 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture for special decontamination work.

Work has already begun in four municipalities to remove radioactive substances from areas within 20 meters of buildings, roads and farmland.

The Environment Ministry itself does not have the know-how to decontaminate such a large area, so it has given contracts to joint ventures led by major construction companies to do the work.

A contract worth 18.8 billion yen to decontaminate the municipality of Naraha was awarded to a group that includes Maeda Corp. and Dai Nippon Construction. A 7.7-billion-yen contract for Iitate was signed with a group that includes Taisei Corp., while a 4.3-billion-yen contract for Kawauchi was given to a group led by Obayashi Corp. A consortium that includes Kajima Corp. was awarded a 3.3-billion-yen contract to clean up Tamura.

In signing the contracts, the Environment Ministry established work rules requiring the companies to place all collected soil and leaves into bags to ensure the radioactive materials would not spread further. The roofs and walls of homes must be wiped by hand or brushes. The use of pressurized sprayers is limited to gutters to avoid the spread of contaminated water. The water used in such cleaning must be properly collected under the ministry's rules.

A special measures law for dealing with radioactive contamination of the environment prohibits the dumping of such waste materials. Violators face a maximum prison sentence of five years or a 10-million-yen fine.

From Dec. 11 to 18, four Asahi reporters spent 130 hours observing work at various locations in Fukushima Prefecture.

At 13 locations in Naraha, Iitate and Tamura, workers were seen simply dumping collected soil and leaves as well as water used for cleaning rather than securing them for proper disposal.

Photographs were taken at 11 of those locations.

The reporters also talked to about 20 workers who said they were following the instructions of employees of the contracted companies or their subcontractors in dumping the materials. A common response of the workers was that the decontamination work could never be completed if they adhered to the strict rules.

Asahi reporters obtained a recording of a supervisor at a site in Naraha instructing a worker to dump cut grass over the side of the road.

Officials of Maeda and Dai Nippon Construction have not responded to questions from The Asahi Shimbun.

Four workers at a site in Tamura said they were told to dispose of leaves and soil in a river. At another site in Tamura, reporters saw the leader of the subcontractor group kick a pile of leaves into the river.

A Kajima official said the company was investigating the incident.

Although the Environment Ministry has asked the construction companies to take radiation readings before and after decontamination work, the limits on measurement sites make it difficult to determine the extent to which decontamination is actually being conducted.

"We were told to clean up only those areas around a measurement site," one worker said.

Environment Ministry officials who work on-site said it is impossible to oversee every aspect of the decontamination effort. But they said they have begun investigating the practices revealed by The Asahi Shimbun.

The latest revelations will call into question whether taxpayer money is being properly used. Some living in Fukushima Prefecture have called for using the decontamination funds to support the lives of the evacuees instead.

The 650 billion yen for initial decontamination covers limited areas in only four municipalities. Questions will likely be raised on whether the decontamination program now being implemented is the best use of taxpayer money.

(This article was compiled from reports by Miki Aoki, Tamiyuki Kihara and Toshio Tada.)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN