

## CROOKED CLEANUP (2): Some decontamination workers sorry for following orders

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### THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A man in his 20s questioned the shady practices involved in decontaminating areas in Fukushima Prefecture, only to be assured that everything was OK.

He continued working and watching others around him dump the collected waste instead of properly storing it for disposal.

Like him, other workers involved in cleaning up the radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster expressed concerns. One even apologized for what he did.

But they were on the bottom employment levels in the decontamination process, and their words apparently meant nothing to their supervisors.

The man in his 20s did eventually inform the Environment Ministry about what was going on. And he recently took Asahi Shimbun reporters to a forested area about 20 meters from a prefectural road in Naraha, about 15 kilometers south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"This is where we dumped the vegetation that should have been collected in bags," the man said.

Fallen leaves and stems were scattered over an area about 1 meter wide and 50 meters long. In some areas, a pile of waste reaching 1.5 meters in height had been created.

A no-entry zone designation was lifted for Naraha in August last year, but residents still cannot return to their homes because a new designation put a large part of the municipality in an area in which preparations are being made for lifting the evacuation order.

A joint venture that includes Maeda Corp. and Dai Nippon Construction is handling decontamination of the Naraha site.

Under rules established by the Environment Ministry, vegetation and soil in an area within 20 meters of both sides of a road must be removed, collected into bags and kept at temporary storage sites. That work is the first step toward reaching the long-term objective of lowering the airborne radiation level to under 0.23 microsievert per hour.

Last October, the man in his 20s was at a job placement center in Tokyo where he found employment with a tertiary subcontractor of the Naraha decontamination project.

Pink tape marked off 20 meters from both sides of the road. Within that area, workers were supposed to cut trees and mow grass before the clippings and fallen leaves were raked into bags and carried from the site.

However, the supervisor from Dai Nippon Construction told the 30 or so workers under his watch to dump whatever would not fit into the bags or to throw materials down the slope outside of the line marked by the pink tape. Whenever the supervisor was not present, the person taking his place gave similar instructions.

The man questioned if the work could actually be called decontamination. He confronted the supervisor about his instructions on Nov. 27 and recorded the conversation.

The man can be heard asking, "Is it all right to just dump the stuff?"

The supervisor replied: "Yeah, yeah, it's OK. It can't be helped."

Fallen leaves were scattered all over the isolated area. The man said he felt the supervisor was convinced that no one would know about what was being dumped.

"Were you told to do this by the Environment Ministry?" the man asked the supervisor.

"No, I heard it from those around me," was the response on the recording.

The man never asked who those people were and abided by the supervisor's instructions.

However, toward the end of last year, he informed the Environment Ministry about the dumping.

Kajima Corp. was part of the joint venture that won the contract to decontaminate forests in Tamura. On Nov. 16 and 17, four workers for a tertiary subcontractor in their 40s and 50s were instructed to gather fallen leaves and stems along a slope by a river--and to dump it into the water. The 3 cubic meters turned the river brown.

A 43-year-old man who was part of that group took an Asahi Shimbun reporter to the site. A pile of leaves was found at the bottom of the slope by the river. The man came from Toyama Prefecture and ended the work on Dec. 26.

"Even though I was following an order, I am sorry for polluting the river," the man said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Miki Aoki and Jun Sato.)

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