

CROOKED CLEANUP: Government to investigate Fukushima decontamination

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The government will investigate decontamination work around the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant following reports that potentially radioactive debris has been dumped into the environment, even during the preparatory stage of the program.

“It is extremely regrettable,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on Jan. 7. “We will take stern measures after fully investigating it.”

An [Environment Ministry](#) task force, headed by Senior Vice Minister Shinji Inoue, held its first meeting later in the day. It is expected to investigate what happened in Fukushima Prefecture, strengthen management of the decontamination operations and find ways to restore public trust in the work.

Asahi Shimbun reporters discovered [violations](#) of Environment Ministry rules listed in the lucrative contracts signed with construction companies for the decontamination work. Under those rules, workers must properly store collected debris and water used for cleaning buildings for proper disposal.

Instead, the reporters found numerous instances of waste being dumped in forests and rivers--often on the instructions of supervisors.

DUMPING OCCURRED IN EARLY PHASE

Some cleanup crews said they were told to dump potentially radioactive debris into rivers even during preparations to establish bases for full-scale decontamination efforts around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The workers talked to The Asahi Shimbun after a Jan. 6 meeting in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, organized mainly by a support group called Hibakurodo-wo Kangaeru Network (network to think of work under radiation exposure), which consists of labor unions, lawyers and others.

Around 20 workers attended the meeting.

Some of them said they dumped branches, leaves and water after cleaning local government offices and other places that would serve as bases for the full-scale decontamination of areas within 20 meters of buildings and roads.

“The supervisor from a subcontractor told me, ‘It’s good to work seriously, but I think it’s OK to dump them over there.’ So I threw away branches and leaves into a river,” said a worker engaged in preparatory decontamination work in Naraha last summer.

Another worker involved in the cleanup in Katsurao said: “Around July, we just allowed the water used to clean buildings to flow away. We were instructed not to do so only on days when Environment Ministry officials came.”

The Jan. 6 meeting, however, was more focused on pressing the Environment Ministry to ensure workers receive special hazard pay, which has not been provided in many cases.

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