



Expert opinion: Juan Carlos Lentijo, director of the Division of Nuclear Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology and mission leader of the International Atomic Energy Agency, speaks during a news conference in Tokyo on Monday. | AFP-JIJI

NATIONAL

## Fukushima nuclear plant cleanup may take more than 40 years: IAEA

AP

APR 24, 2013

[ARTICLE HISTORY](#) |

A U.N. nuclear watchdog team said Japan may need longer than the projected 40 years to decommission the Fukushima power plant and urged Tepco to improve stability at the facility.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency team, Juan Carlos Lentijo, said Monday that damage at the nuclear plant is so complex that it is impossible to predict how long the cleanup may last.

“As for the duration of the decommissioning project, this is something that you can define in your plans. But in my view, it will be nearly impossible to ensure the time for decommissioning such a complex facility in less than 30 to 40 years as it is currently established in the road map,” Lentijo said.

The government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. have predicted the cleanup would take up to 40 years. They still have to develop technology and equipment that can operate under fatally high radiation levels to locate and remove melted fuel. The reactors must be kept cool and the plant must stay safe and stable, and those efforts to ensure safety could slow the process down.

The plant still runs on makeshift equipment and frequently suffers glitches.

Just over the past few weeks, the plant suffered nearly a dozen problems ranging from extensive power outages to leaks of highly radioactive water from underground water pools. On Monday, Tepco had to stop the cooling system for one of the fuel storage pools for safety checks after finding two dead rats inside a transformer box.

Earlier this month, a rat short-circuited a switchboard, causing an extensive outage and cooling loss for up to 30 hours.

Lentijo said water management is “probably the most challenging” task for the plant for now.

The problems have raised concerns about whether the plant, crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, can stay intact throughout a decommissioning process. The problems have prompted officials to compile risk-reduction measures and review decommissioning plans.

Lentijo, an expert on nuclear fuel cycles and waste technology, warned of more problems to come.

“It is expectable in such a complex site, additional incidents will occur as it happened in the nuclear plants under normal operations,” Lentijo said. “It is important to have a very good capability to identify as promptly as possible failures and to establish compensatory measures.”

He said Tepco’s disclosures have been problematic and urged the utility to take extra steps to regain public trust.

The IAEA team urged the utility to “improve the reliability of essential systems to assess the structural integrity of site facilities, and to enhance protection against external hazards” and promptly replace temporary equipment with a reliable, permanent system.

[MAIL THE EDITOR \(HTTP://WWW.JAPANTIMES.CO.JP/CONTACT-US/READER-MAIL/\)](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/contact-us/reader-mail/)

[REUBLISHING \(HTTP://WWW.JAPANTIMES.CO.JP/ABOUT-US/REUBLISHING/\)](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/about-us/republishing/)

[COMMENTING POLICY \(HTTP://WWW.JAPANTIMES.CO.JP/ABOUT-US/COMMENTING-POLICY/\)](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/about-us/commenting-policy/)