

## Fukushima plant chief defied TEPCO headquarters to protect workers

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By NAOYA KON/ Staff Writer

Exasperated by his superiors, the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant rejected orders to send workers back into the crippled plant a week after the disaster struck.

“My people have been working day and night for eight straight days,” Masao Yoshida barked at officials of Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s head office in Tokyo during a teleconference on March 18, 2011. “And they’ve been going to the site a number of times. They pour water, make checks and add oil periodically. I cannot make them be exposed to even more radiation.”

TEPCO, the operator of the plant, allowed journalists on Nov. 30 to view the video footage of its in-house teleconference following the disaster.

Like earlier footage released by the utility, the latest clips underscored the chaos and confusion at the plant and TEPCO headquarters after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown.

“All workers are approaching 200 (millisieverts) in exposure or have even topped 200,” Yoshida said. “I cannot tell them to go and connect wires under high radiation.”

Yoshida had asked for an increase in manpower since the accident began. His frustrations over TEPCO’s lack of progress in providing additional support boiled over in the teleconference with the head office.

“If we do the work under a plan with no feasibility, it will end in failure. We cannot do it unless we have thorough help,” he said.

Sakae Muto, an executive vice president at the Tokyo office, could not provide a specific plan for extra help.

“We are now seeking people from a wide range, including former employees, and are planning to figure out the necessary manpower by tomorrow morning,” Muto said. “We will prepare to send those people to you as soon as possible.”

Yoshida stepped down as the plant’s chief for health reasons in December 2011. Muto also resigned.

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