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New imaging robot to crawl inside Fukushima buildings

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By HIROHIKO NAKAMURA/ Staff Writer

Researchers have built a new and more nimble camera-carrying robot to climb stairs inside the Fukushima No. 1 plant and deliver images from areas where radiation levels remain dangerously high.

The robot, named "Sakura," is the work of the Chiba Institute of Technology, which adapted an earlier model at the request of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator. CIT unveiled the device Oct. 16.

The new robot is smaller than its predecessor and is intended to climb and descend the narrow stairs that lead to the basements of reactor buildings, officials said.

TEPCO wants to be able to see the condition inside reactor elements such as the containment vessel and the pressure suppression chamber.

Earlier, it tried to use the "Quince" robot, which was developed by a joint team including CIT researchers. But that 70-centimeter-long robot had difficulty turning corners on the internal staircases, whose steps are exactly 70 cm wide.

The Sakura is 50 cm long and 39 cm wide, 20 cm shorter and 10 cm narrower than the Quince.

The wire-controlled robot will carry a high-performance camera and a microphone.

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