

Nuclear power industry's shady payments since Fukushima crisis

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The nuclear power industry has made behind-the-scenes payments to the tune of at least 3.18 billion yen (\$40 million) to six local governments hosting nuclear-power related facilities since the Fukushima disaster last year.

The funds were doled out by six nuclear power-related organizations, including electric power companies, The Asahi Shimbun learned.

Of that amount, 2.4 billion yen was not disclosed. The only conclusion to draw from this is that dubious payments to local governments have continued since the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Asahi Shimbun, relying on the information disclosure law and interviews, surveyed 39 prefectures or municipalities that are hosting or plan to host nuclear power plants or facilities related to the central government's spent nuclear fuel recycling program.

The survey, which wound up in July, excluded donations to assist victims of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that spawned the nuclear crisis.

The six companies and organizations that made donations are: the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (Denjiren); Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.; Chubu Electric Power Co.; Japan Atomic Power Co.; Chugoku Electric Power Co.; and Kyushu Electric Power Co.

The funds were given to the Aomori prefectural government; the Rokkasho village government in Aomori Prefecture; the Shizuoka prefectural government; the Tsuruga city government in Fukui Prefecture; the Matsue city government in Shimane Prefecture; and the Saga prefectural government.

In addition to these entities, some other local governments won assurances from electric power companies that funds will continue to be channeled to them in or after fiscal 2012.

Thus, the amount uncovered so far may be just the tip of the iceberg.

At the end of July, the electric power companies disclosed donations made in fiscal 2011 on their websites. However, the names of individual recipients and sums were not released.

Of the 3.18 billion yen in donations tracked by The Asahi Shimbun, only those provided by Chubu Electric Power and Kyushu Electric Power were made public last month.

As for donations to local governments, it emerged that Tokyo Electric Power Co. provided funds to the Rokkasho village government after the Fukushima disaster, labeling them as supposed expenditures for the construction of a nuclear power plant in the neighboring village of Higashidori, also in Aomori Prefecture.

The flow of funds suggests that local governments cannot help but rely on the largesse of the power industry to keep their coffers filled.

After the Fukushima disaster, the Rokkasho village government twice wrote to Denjiren to solicit donations.

A letter sent in August 2011 sought 500 million yen to promote local industries. The other, sent in February 2012, sought 250 million yen for the repair of "onsen" hot spring facilities. Denjiren complied with both requests.

The village hosts facilities associated with the spent nuclear fuel recycling program promoted by the central government.

Rokkasho was clearly jolted by a central government announcement after the disaster that it planned to review the recycling program.

Rokkasho's mayor, Kenji Furukawa, said, "If the central government changes its policy (and abolishes the recycling program), that will have a huge effect on local industry, employment and overall finances."

He made clear that Rokkasho village will continue to solicit funding from Denjiren.

Chubu Electric Power donated a sum of 460 million yen to the Shizuoka prefectural government last September. This past July, it notified the prefectural government that a further 560 million yen in funds would be forthcoming.

The utility said it was making the payments at the behest of the prefectural government.

At the end of 2008, Chubu Electric Power decided to decommission the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear power plant in Omaezaki, Shizuoka Prefecture.

That prompted the central government to suspend grants to the prefectural government for hosting the two reactors.

But by that time, four local municipalities had got used to the free money and depended on the grants to draw up their budget needs. In light of that, the prefectural government asked the electric power company to offer financial support to the tune of 2.2 billion yen to match the amounts of the suspended grants.

In response, the electric power company began to provide donations from fiscal 2009.

A Shizuoka prefectural government official said, "We did not come straight out and ask the electric power company to provide donations. We just told it, 'We hope you will consider our situation.'"

Kyushu Electric Power donated 300 million yen for the construction of cancer treatment facilities under the initiative of the Saga prefectural government.

Japan Atomic Power Co. is shouldering the entire 240 million yen in construction costs for a network of municipal roads being built in Fukui Prefecture's Tsuruga Peninsula, where six nuclear reactors are located.

The Tsuruga city government expects to receive 1.08 billion yen in donations from the nuclear power industry in fiscal 2012.

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