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TEPCO rejects ministry's demand to pay 10.5 billion yen for decontamination work

April 21, 2013

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By FUKUKO TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. refuses to pay 10.55 billion yen (\$106 million) for decontamination work around its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, saying it is under no legal obligation to do so.

“We don’t know whether those costs are covered by the special measures law,” a TEPCO official said.

The Environment Ministry disagrees. It says the money is part of the 14.9 billion yen in decontamination costs that TEPCO is required to pay under that special measures law to deal with radioactive substances from the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima plant.

The ministry has not set deadlines for the payments, meaning there will be no delinquent charges. But if it cannot get TEPCO to pay the amount, the government might be forced to cover the costs with taxpayers’ money.

The government allocated 372.1 billion yen for decontamination costs in the budget for fiscal 2012, which ended last month. In the budget plan for fiscal 2013, 497.8 billion yen has been set aside for the clean-up work.

Including amounts for subsequent years, the total decontamination cost is expected to swell to several trillion yen.

Based on the special measures law, the ministry in November 2012 demanded TEPCO pay 7.6 billion yen in decontamination costs for the period until August 2012. Of that amount, 1.7 billion yen is for the central government’s work in “special areas” around the Fukushima plant, as well as 2.4 billion yen in central government subsidies paid to local governments that are cleaning up their own areas.

In addition, 1.94 billion yen was spent for advance research on the number of houses subject to decontamination work and their radiation levels. The remaining amount includes 960 million yen in publicity costs for the decontamination efforts.

“We will demand payment of all additional costs,” the ministry told TEPCO.

TEPCO paid 1.7 billion yen to the ministry for the decontamination work in the special areas. But it says it won’t pay the remaining 5.9 billion yen.

In February, the ministry again demanded, in written form, that TEPCO cover the remaining costs.

On Feb. 7, the ministry required TEPCO to pay an additional 7.3 billion yen in decontamination costs for the period from September to November 2012.

TEPCO plans to pay 2.65 billion yen of the amount, but it refuses to pay the remaining 4.65 billion yen.

“We understand that all of those decontamination costs should be shouldered by TEPCO,” Hiroyuki Eguchi, a ministry official, said. “We are now waiting for its reply.”

TEPCO public relations office declined to comment on the issue.

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