

Working conditions at Fukushima: “The workers would return the dosimeters before the alarms went off”, “unfair labor practices”

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Toshiba warned over illegal working hours at Fukushima plant

FUKUSHIMA — A labor standards inspection office on Nov. 27 warned Toshiba Corp. and 17 other companies over workers illegally exceeding 10 hours of labor a day at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, it has been learned.

According to Toshiba and its subsidiary Toshiba Plant Systems & Services Corp., from July through October this year it made employees work at the plant for over 10 hours a day. Since the workers' dosimeters were set to ring alarms after nine and a half hours of duty, the workers would return the dosimeters before the alarms went off and newly rent them before returning to duty.

The Labor Standards Act defines work that involves exposure to radiation as “work that is harmful to one’s health,” and since the nuclear disaster, almost all of the Fukushima plant grounds are designated as areas where work would fall under that category. The act says that work in such areas cannot exceed eight hours of regular labor and two hours of overtime. The warning to Toshiba and the other companies was issued by the Tomioka labor standards inspection office.

A representative for Toshiba’s public and investor relations department says, “We were not including meeting time and standby time in the work hours. We viewed them differently from how the labor standards supervisory organ did.” The representative also says that the excess of work hours was “at most a few hours,” and that the problem was dealt with in mid-October after an outside source pointed it out.

Meanwhile, a representative for Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima restoration headquarters said, “We leave management of workers’ labor to our contracted companies, and do not know about individual problems (that occur under them.)”

There have been repeated problems at the Fukushima plant, such as radioactively contaminated underground water leaking into the ocean, and the government has announced it will take a primary role in disaster-management work there. It has decided to apply public funds to the work.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 12, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131212p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Ex-Fukushima plant worker accuses TEPCO of refusing collective bargaining

A former worker at the disaster-crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has accused its operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) of unjustly refusing collective bargaining over his dismissal.

The Haken Union, a labor union for temporary and contract workers, filed for support from the Labor Relations Commission of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government on Nov. 28 on behalf of Tetsuya Hayashi, a 41-year-old resident of Nagano Prefecture who worked at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant as a subcontract worker. The Haken Union accused TEPCO, its prime contractor and other companies of engaging in unfair labor practices by refusing to respond to collective bargaining.

According to the complaint and other sources, Hayashi entered into an employment contract with a fifth-tier subcontractor of TEPCO in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, in June 2012. The company, which handled work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, initially explained to Hayashi that his work assignments, such as management of work tools, would be risk-free. However, his job was changed, exposing him to high levels of radiation at the plant. On June 19 that year, Hayashi was forced to engage in removal of glass near nuclear reactor buildings for two hours. He protested over the change, but he was dismissed the following day.

Hayashi joined the Haken Union and called for collective bargaining with TEPCO and four other companies, demanding that his dismissal be retracted. However, all companies but the fifth-tier firm refused to comply with his request.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131129p2a00m0na008000c.html>
