

# **Fukushima: Contaminated nuke plant workers going back on job as safety regs go by wayside**

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Safety standards for workers at the tsunami-hit nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture have been relaxed without any scrutiny, forcing workers to do their jobs without being completely decontaminated, it has emerged.

Workers who are struggling to get the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)-operated Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under control as well as experts have expressed grave concern about possible health hazards.

Radiation levels on the premises of the power station remain high, with part of the ruins of its No. 3 reactor building — badly damaged by a hydrogen explosion — emitting 900 millisieverts of radiation per hour.

Safety regulations dictate that when it is estimated workers will be exposed to more than 1 millisievert of radiation per day at a nuclear power plant, companies contracted by the plant operator must submit a work plan specifying the anticipated radiation levels to the local labor standards inspection office, get a receipt stamp and submit a copy of the document to the plant operator.

Some contractors then hand copies of the document to their subcontractors as a special permit to perform the work.

An employee of one of the subcontractors at Fukushima plant said he worked there without such a special permit and was exposed to 1.3 millisieverts of radiation over a 2 1/2-hour period. Subsequent screening detected radioactive substances on the back of the employee's head and neck, as well as those of about 10 co-workers.

They washed with special shampoo at the nuclear crisis operations center about 20 kilometers away from the plant. However, three of them were unable to completely decontaminate themselves. They tried again at a TEPCO facility but failed to completely remove radioactive substances from their bodies. TEPCO subsequently issued a certificate specifying the areas of their bodies contaminated with radioactive material, and they returned to work.

In cases where radioactive substances are detected on workers' bodies, their employers are required to submit a report detailing the work they performed and how they were contaminated to the original contractor, which in turn must notify TEPCO.

However, the workers' subcontractor has neither submitted such a report to the original contractor nor been instructed by the contractor or TEPCO to do so. The employee has pointed out that the safety regulations have been eased without any scrutiny amid the ongoing crisis.

"Both TEPCO and the original contractor appear to be thinking it's natural that we're contaminated

with radioactive substances, considering our working environment,” he lamented.

“Many of us are eager to help get the plant under control, and think we can’t avoid being contaminated. But frankly speaking, we’re concerned,” he added.

TEPCO said the certificate specifying the areas of workers’ bodies contaminated is issued if high levels of radiation are detected during screening, but claimed that such workers are completely decontaminated before returning to work.

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\* Mainichi Shimbun, May 14, 2011:

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/news/20110514p2a00m0na014000c.html>