

# **Fukushima: TEPCO sub-subcontractor urged employees to cover up their exposure to radiation**

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An executive of a company commissioned by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to perform part of the work to bring its crippled nuclear plant under control instructed workers at the site to cover their dosimeters with lead in an apparent attempt to hide their exposure to radiation, it has been learned.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has launched an investigation into the case suspecting that it could constitute a violation of the Industrial Safety and Health Act, which strictly limits the amount of radiation workers can be exposed to.

"We'll firmly deal with the matter once the practice is confirmed to constitute a violation of any law," the ministry's Labor Standards Bureau said.

In November last year, Buildup, a medium-sized construction company based in Fukushima Prefecture, won a contract to perform part of the work to bring the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under control as a sub-subcontractor of TEPCO.

About 10 workers of Buildup were engaged in work in December to cover hoses in the plant's contaminated water purification system with insulation materials.

Sources close to the case said a board member of Buildup instructed the workers at a dormitory to shroud their dosimeters with lead covers shortly before the work began at the power plant in an apparent bid to make it look as if they were exposed to far less radiation than the actual amount.

Buildup officials said they cannot contact the board member now.

Article 22 of the Industrial Safety and Health Act stipulates that employers must take necessary measures to prevent workers' health from being affected by their labor. If employers force workers to shroud their dosimeters with lead while working at facilities where radiation levels are high, it could constitute a violation of the clause. Violators could face up to six months in prison or a fine of up to 500,000 yen.

Buildup President Takashi Wada expressed regret over the revelations. "It's extremely regrettable and we take the matter seriously. We'll conduct an investigation into the case based on information from our employees and report the results," he said in a statement.

An official of Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc., a TEPCO subcontractor that farmed out the work to Buildup, said, "We received a report about the case from (Buildup) President Wada. It appears true that the company produced lead covers, but workers have told us they never used the covers although they had been instructed to use them. In any case, it's outrageous."

TEPCO's public relations department said it has instructed Tokyo Energy & Systems to promptly get

to the bottom of the incident and report the results.

**Kyodo Press**

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