

# Japan: Group led by atomic energy commissioner favored even after Fukushima disaster

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## **Utilities gave money to group led by atomic energy commissioner even after Fukushima disaster**

Power industry entities such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) have extended large sums of money to a nonprofit organization led by Etsuko Akiba, a commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), the *Mainichi* has learned.

The nonprofit group, ASCA Energy Forum, based in Tokyo's Chuo Ward, has received at least 18 million yen from TEPCO, the FEPC and others even after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The revelation comes after the resignation of Akira Omoto, a former TEPCO executive, as a JAEC commissioner for having accepted advisory fees from TEPCO even after the Fukushima disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Omoto, 64, stepped down after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was hard for his government to gain the public's understanding of Omoto's action.

Akiba, 64, established ASCA Energy Forum in 2001 when she was a consumer advocate. The group acquired NPO status in 2003 and Akiba quit as its chief after assuming a JAEC commissioner post in January 2010. However, she has stayed on with the NPO as an adviser.

In business reports submitted to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, ASCA Energy Forum posted 20-40 million yen in annual revenue from fiscal 2009 to 2011, mainly from TEPCO, the power federation and related sources, according to ASCA officials. Even after the Fukushima catastrophe, ASCA registered revenue of over 22.8 million yen in fiscal 2011, including over 6 million yen from the federation, over 1.63 million yen from TEPCO and about 2.5 million yen from the Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization (JAERO).

JAERO is an incorporated foundation created by the atomic power industry and academia to promote public understanding of nuclear power. It is now headed by a former executive of Chubu Electric Power Co. and its executive director is a former official of Kansai Electric Power Co.

In fiscal 2012, ASCA has received at least 18 million yen from the utilities industry, including more

than 6 million yen from the power federation and about 1.5 million yen from JAERO. Despite its status as a nonprofit organization, ASCA chalked up net assets of over 38 million yen at the end of fiscal 2011.

Armed with these funds, ASCA has conducted study session primarily aimed at housewives on nuclear power plants and radiation, and published a journal. It was entrusted with consumer questionnaires from TEPCO, for which it received 800,000 yen a month through May 2011 and 9.6 million yen annually in fiscal 2009 and 2010.

In addition, ASCA has received an order for subcontract work to foster public understanding of high-level nuclear waste as an entity authorized by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, getting about 10 million yen in fiscal 2011. Certain details about the subcontract deal have been made public, but ASCA has not disclosed funds received from TEPCO, the power federation or JAERO.

ASCA's secretariat says it cannot identify its partners but has briefed these partners on the ASCA's projects while releasing business reports. It also says it has provided venues for neutral study and its activities do not reflect the intentions of the power industry.

The secretariat also says Akiba works with no remuneration and is consulted only in a pinch because of her in-depth knowledge and network.

JAERO says it has entrusted ASCA with activities within the scope of funds it has given the nonprofit group, while TEPCO and the power federation declined to comment on individual dealings. Akiba has declined to respond to repeated requests for comment.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na014000c.html>

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## **Atomic energy bigwig's NPO favored for nuke waste disposal project**

A nonprofit organization set up by Etsuko Akiba, commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), has received exclusive orders from a government-authorized corporation for a nuclear waste disposal project she played a part in introducing, it has been learned.

The scheme — called “high-level nuclear waste workshop project” and run by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan (NUMO) — was deliberated on and introduced by a government energy committee when Akiba was a committee member before she joined JAEC. Her NPO group, ASCA Energy Forum based in Tokyo, has received exclusive orders from NUMO, a corporation authorized by the minister of economy, industry and trade.

Because NPOs cannot accept orders directly from NUMO, ASCA Energy Forum has received orders for the project by way of a third-party contractor. Despite a change in original contractors, however, ASCA Energy Forum has continued to receive the orders as a sole subcontractor. The amount of the order totals more than 140 million yen over the past six years.

The revelation comes in the wake of the disclosure that power industry entities such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan have extended large

sums of money to Akiba's NPO.

The nuclear waste workshop project was brought forth after the Kochi Prefecture town of Toyo withdrew its application in April 2007 for a feasibility survey for setting up a nuclear waste final disposal site in the town following residents' protests. In November that year, the nuclear waste subcommittee under the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy's Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy recommended the introduction of the project, citing the necessity of creating a venue for learning about nuclear waste disposal at grass-roots level. At the time, Akiba was serving as a member of the nuclear waste subcommittee and supported the project initiative, stating at a meeting in September that year, "I was disappointed at the Toyo town's withdrawal. I want public relations for the entire nation to be enhanced." At the time, Akiba was also doubling as a member of NUMO's committee for adjusting disclosure of information.

According to NUMO and other sources, the project was launched in February 2008 and was on a free contract basis with planning competitions among two to five corporate applicants a year until fiscal 2010. Although NPOs cannot apply, the ASCA Energy Forum joined hands with the Japan Productivity Center (JPC), a public interest incorporated foundation, to receive the order, with JPC serving as an original contractor and ASCA as a subcontractor. In fiscal 2011 on the heels of the Great East Japan Earthquake, JPC and ASCA were jointly awarded the project order without competition.

After JPC withdrew from energy projects in fiscal 2012, ASCA teamed up with an advertisement company in Tokyo, with the latter successfully bidding for the project at some 40 million yen.

Under the project, the original contractor secured venues for workshops on nuclear waste while the NPO solicited participants through its networks and took charge of event proceedings. According to sources close to ASCA, it received some 10 million to 20 million yen a year in operating expenses.

"Basically, the project utilizes the networks of NPOs. Because JPC had affiliations with ASCA, we received its application for the project," said a representative of NUMO. Asked why ASCA continues to exclusively receive the orders, the representative said, "It is possible that past achievements are taken into account during screening. The ad agency (that participated in the fiscal 2012 bid) may have also thought it would be able to carry out the project with confidence if it teamed up with ASCA."

Meanwhile, the secretariat of ASCA Energy Forum said, "There were no advance consultations or prearrangements with NUMO." Akiba has declined to respond to interviews by the *Mainichi*.

\* *Mainichi Shimbun*, March 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130326p2a00m0na011000c.html>

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