

The Committee for Enhancing International Dissemination of Information about the Radiation
Surrounding Workers at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station
Entrusted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

On November 15, 2021, a briefing session and tour of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station was conducted for overseas journalists, in collaboration with TEPCO.

The event is held annually by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Its purpose is to enhance understanding of the measures taken to secure workplace safety and health at the station and to reduce workers' exposure to radiation, and understanding of the progress made in decommissioning the reactor. Four journalists participated in the event this year.

Active opinion exchanges over workers' compensation, follow-up surveys, and infection control

In the morning, a briefing session was held in the visitors' room in the new main office building. Professor Kunugita of the University of Occupational and Environmental Health, who is the chairperson of the committee, and TEPCO's Deputy Site Superintendent Kimoto outlined the laws and regulations on industrial safety and health, the efforts made by the government and TEPCO to reduce workers' radiation exposure levels, and the progress made in decommissioning operations. This year, video lectures by Chairperson Kunugita and another committee member, Mr. Kowatari, had been prepared beforehand. Participants watched the "Occupational Safety and Health-Related Laws" and "Basic Radiation Knowledge" lectures in advance of the event, in order to enhance the efficiency of the session.

Since the beginning of 2020, the station has been vigilant against the new coronavirus infection and has strictly maintained social distancing. It has established a reporting system among affiliated companies, and does not permit visitors to access the lunch areas or rest areas in order to reduce human-to-human contact. As a result of these early shoreline operations, taken to prevent any outbreak of new coronavirus clusters, the progress of the decommissioning work has not been affected by the pandemic.

Following the briefing, the participants exchanged opinions actively, demonstrating a strong interest in labor health and the environment, including the issues of workers' compensation and follow-up surveys of workers who suffered emergency exposure.

Generation of polluted water decreased to one-quarter of that in 2014

In the afternoon the participants rode on a site bus without wearing guard clothes, equipped only with personal dosimeters (APDs), and toured the premises. As a result of decontamination works to prevent radioactive materials from rising, which included removal of debris and surface soil, and the covering of the ground surface with asphalt, the annual additional effective doses at the site boundary

were reduced to less than one millisievert (1 mSv) by the end of fiscal year 2015. The green zone, which people are permitted to enter wearing ordinary clothes, now extends to 96% of the site area. Freed from the burden of protective clothing, workers can now work in ordinary work clothes on most parts of the site, thus making the decommissioning work more efficiently.

After being given a brief explanation of the decontamination work on Sakura Street, the participants passed through treated water tanks and multi-nuclide removal equipment (ALPS) by bus, continuing to a small hill in front of the reactor buildings of Units 1 to 4, where they had a glimpse of the present work scene.

From the hill, the participants saw large, 750-ton suspension cranes rising high in front of them, under preparation for the removal of fuel from the spent fuel pool. There are only a few dozen such cranes in Japan; they were also used to dismantle the common exhaust pipes of Units 1 and 2. At Unit 1, a large cover shielding the entire upper part of the reactor building will be installed to control dust scattering and rainwater entering the building. Large items of debris will be removed before the removal of fuel, which is scheduled to start in and after fiscal year 2027. Impermeable wall (frozen-soil wall) has been built, as one of the measures taken to prevent water from reaching the contamination source. At present, 140 m³ of contaminated water is generated each day. This is approximately one-quarter of the amount generated in 2014.

Direct experience of radiation measurement

On the site, the participants could pick up the bottle of ALPS water treated with multi-nuclide removal equipment (ALPS). Helicopters can be used to ferry doctors to and from the site, and drastically shorten the time required to transport patients. The journalists participating in the tour listened enthusiastically to the explanation of how labor safety is secured and how the labor environment has been improved.

Throughout the event, they saw for themselves the efforts made by the government and corporations, including strict control over radiation exposure of workers, improvement of the work environment, securing of labor safety, etc., and learned firsthand about the atmosphere on the site.

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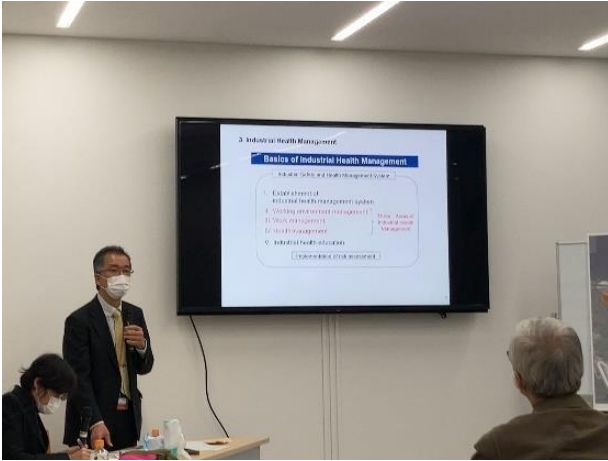


Photo by Mayama