

Stories & Facts from Fukushima

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URL: www.fukushimaonthe globe.com
E-mail: info@fukushimabeacon.net

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A Case Story

The never ending problem of radioactive waste (2)

—Neglected voices of the residents

Toshiyuki Takeuchi



Cattles grazing in Kibo no Bokujo (Ranch of Hope) ©Fukuden

Ranch of Hope

330 heads of cattle graze in the fields of the vast ranch. The smokestacks of the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear power plant that was the site of a serious nuclear accident 4 years and 8 months ago are visible 14 kilometers away. This place was once Yoshizawa Ranch, but after the accident, has become known as Kibo no Bokujo, or the Ranch of Hope. Although an evacuation order was issued for the residents within 20 kilometers of the accident, the cattle in the area could not be

evacuated and were destined to be destroyed by the government. However, 61-year old Masami Yoshizawa elected to stay behind in opposition to the government's plans and continues to look after his cattle and that of neighboring farmers stuck in the same situation.

News of the incident at Ranch of Hope was reported on November 18th, 2015. Shiroishi, located on the southern end of Miyagi prefecture to the north of Fukushima prefecture, used public funds to transport to the ranch about 1,100 rolls (1 roll = 300-500 kilograms) of grass contaminated by radioactive materials that had been stored all over the city following the accident.

The cattle are naturally still grazing on the ranch's contaminated pastures, but it is not large enough to sustain so many and Yoshizawa has had to procure grass from other regions. All grass in eastern Japan was contaminated to some degree following the nuclear accident, but for these cows destined to be killed no matter what kind of grass they eat, there is no other way.

Not everyone is happy about the grass being sent. The mayor of Namie town, where the ranch is located, visited Shiroishi's city hall to express his objection. According to him, "If they continue to send more contaminated material, I'm afraid our town is going to become a dumping point for radioactive waste."

Namie officials and residents are continuing to evacuate the town, and the town hall has relocated to neighboring Nihonmatsu, although some functions have been returned to the main offices in Namie during the day. Similarly, residents are also able to return to their homes except for at night. Yoshizawa is the one exception, remaining at home both day and night.

Namie had a population of 21,000 at the time of the accident, and within the range of 4 kilometers to 30 or so kilometers of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, a large portion of the town has been designated as "no-return zone."^{*1} Even the most recent surveys find that less than 20% of evacuated residents wish to return to their homes at this time. More than a few evacuees object to the government's "recovery plan" to

All grass in eastern Japan was contaminated to some degree, but for these cows destined to be killed no matter what kind of grass they eat, there is no other way.

*Masami Yoshizawa holding a picture book titled "Ranch of Hope", which is about his life after the disaster.
©Fukuden*



*Rolls of grass sent to Ranch of Hope.
Black bags are the ones from Shiroishi.
©Fukudn*



downplay the level of radiation released into the environment, lift the evacuation order, and urge residents to return.

The "other contaminants" that worry Namie's mayor is the contaminated waste that measures over 8000 becquerels(Bq) per kg of radioactive materials classified as Designated Waste by a law enacted following the accident*².

However, due to strong opposition from residents, many municipalities in eastern Japan excluding those in Fukushima Prefecture have reluctantly continued to store such waste.

Situation of final landfill sites construction in other prefectures

There is one specific issue that must be taken into account when considering contaminated waste in Fukushima Prefecture. That is, the issue of the construction of final landfill sites for Designated Waste in 5 other prefectures that is currently underway by the Ministry of the Environment. Temporary incinerators are being planned in Miyagi and Tochigi prefectures along with the final landfill sites.

Designated Waste is the name assigned by the Ministry of the Environment to waste such as rice straw contained by radioactive materials scattered by the nuclear accident, incinerated ash from refuse, and sewage sludge that exceeds radioactive concentration of 8,000 Bq/kg. Out of this, the waste exceeding 100,000 Bq/kg that is to be stored in planned interim storage facilities within Fukushima and transferred to final landfill sites outside the prefecture within 30 years is a different case altogether.

Miyagi, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Chiba, and Gunma have established a policy to construct landfill sites in each prefecture for disposal of the designated waste generated within each prefecture, which measures 100,000 Bq/kg or less.

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1. No-return zones: Officially called "Areas where it is expected that residents will face difficulties in returning for a long time." Areas wherein the annual cumulative dose of radiation exceeds 50 mSv and will likely not fall below 20 mSv after 5 years have passed. People cannot enter the area without permission and wearing protective gear.
 2. Generally referred to as The Act on Special Measures Concerning the Handling of Radioactive Pollution. English translation of the full text of the Act can be read at:
http://josen.env.go.jp/en/framework/pdf/special_act.pdf?20130118

However, as can be seen in events with the Ranch of Hope, many cities, towns, and villages in eastern Japan are worried about the disposal of contaminated materials that measure over 100 Bq/kg but less than 8,000 Bq/kg, that are unnecessary to be classified as Designated Waste, and have continued to store such waste since the March 2011 nuclear accident due to overwhelming opposition from residents. Miyagi Prefecture currently possesses nearly 20 times more of such waste than Designated Waste.

Many cities, towns, and villages in eastern Japan are worried about the disposal of contaminated materials that are unnecessary to be classified as Designated Waste.

Opposition to the construction of final landfill sites sometimes comes from local council and local heads of office in addition to residents at the proposed sites. The Ministry of the Environment has to proceed carefully, including setting up a selection process with participation from experts. Still, choosing candidate sites is a slow and laborious process.

In Kami town in Miyagi prefecture and Shioya town in Tochigi prefecture, the local governments and residents stand together in agreement in their opposition.

The opposition movement in Kami, the Association to Resolutely Oppose Construction of a Final Landfill Site for Radioactive Special Waste, demands that the Act on special measures, that is the basis of the construction of the final landfill sites, should be revised and the waste contaminated with more than 100Bq/kg of radiation should be included into the definition of Designated Waste instead of the present definition that excludes the waste with less than 8,000Bq/kg. At the same time, they also insist that radioactive waste generated by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant should be centrally managed in and around the area of the plant.

On December 3rd, it was announced that the Fukushima prefecture would accept national government's plan to use the Fukushima Eco-tech Clean Center, an existing industrial waste landfill site, as the final landfill site of Designated Waste generated in the prefecture. Prior to



Residents of Kami town in Miyagi prefecture demonstrate against construction of the final landfill site of Designated Waste in their town.

6 the Association to Resolutely Oppose Construction of a Final Landfill Site for Radioactive Special Waste

this announcement, Fukushima prefectural government had decided to grant a subsidy of 10 billion JPY (10 billion JPY \approx 81.5 million USD) as regional development costs for both Tomioka and Naraha towns in which the Center is located in exchange for taking on the unwanted facilities. By offering such a large amount of financial support, the prefectural government is pressuring the towns into agreeing to accept the waste.

Numerous residents live in the area near the Center's loading entrance in Naraha. The town council has acknowledged they have received pressure from opposition movements by local residents to oppose accepting the waste, but due to the large amount of financial support being offered, the council entrusted the decision to the mayor and approval was given as a result, leaving residents without a say in the matter.

Currently, the answer to the question of where to place the final landfill sites in the 5 prefectures outside of Fukushima has yet to be determined.

Is this “Build Back Better?”

The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in March 2015 in Sendai, the capital city of Miyagi, Fukushima's neighboring prefecture to the north. Standing to greet the attendees, Prime Minister Abe spoke proudly of Japan's project to recover from the Great East Japan Earthquake with the slogan "Build back better."

One goal of this third world conference was to develop an international framework to facilitate routine preparedness to natural and man-made disasters and reduce risk in all phases including response in the event of a disaster and subsequent recovery and reconstruction. The conferences so far have all been held in Japan per the government's initiatives following their own acknowledgement of the country's experience with frequent disasters.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted at The 3rd UN World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction. Throughout of the text, it advocates the importance of risk disclosure and participation from a wide range of stakeholders including civil society in the planning and implementation of emergency response and reconstruction planning in the event of disasters. However, those words ring hollow when faced with the issue of the disposal of radioactive waste. experiments.

The government issued an evacuation order to the municipalities in the coastal region of Fukushima prefecture near the power plant following the nuclear accident in 2011. Since the beginning of this year, evacuation orders are being lifted one by one behind claims that radiation levels have dropped as a result of decontamination efforts, and evacuees are urged to return to their home. In September, evacuation order to Naraha town was lifted and the town became the first of seven towns that had been entirely evacuated to begin returning of the residents and officials to their home.

By accelerating progress of decontamination, the government has decided to lift the evacuation zone designation by March 2017 except from “no-return

Standing to greet the attendees, Prime Minister Abe spoke proudly of Japan's project to recover from the Great East Japan Earthquake with the slogan "Build back better."

zone”, the highly contaminated regions wherein the annual radiation dose is higher than 50 mSv.

According to surveys of residents evacuated from those regions, however, only 10-40% of them wish to return home. Although radiation levels are said to have dropped, the standard for returning evacuees home is 20 mSv or less annual dose. This standard is 20 times higher than the 1 mSv annual dose for the general public that is recognized internationally and had been the norm prior to the accident. Those within the prefecture claim that this is a human rights issue on discrimination against the residents of Fukushima.

Some residents see these policies as a kind of “shock doctrine” practice taken by the government under false pretenses of recovering from the disaster.

Some residents see these policies as a kind of “shock doctrine” practice taken by the government under false pretenses of recovering from the disaster. Shock doctrine, also referred to as “disaster capitalism,” means that policymakers and the ruling class produce a more desirable society for themselves by introducing extreme market fundamentalism and advancing economic reforms and the pursuit of profit when people are in a state of shock or stupor in the period before their lives have returned to normal and society has been restored following a disaster, war, terrorist act, or other such catastrophe. This process can lead to “disaster fascism” wherein human rights such as the right to know and right to participate are restricted.

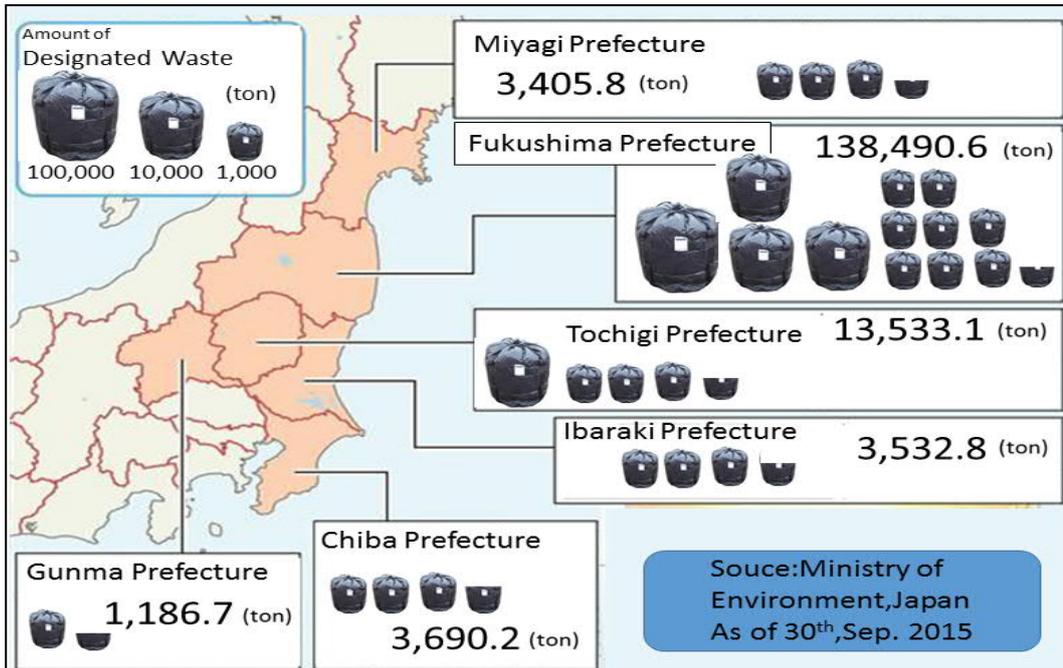
The government (the Ministry of the Environment) has devoted a substantial amount of the recovery budget to the disposal of the Designated Waste that they say is essential to the recovery process. However, when we look into the case of the temporary incinerators touched upon last issue and the case of the construction of the final landfill sites reported on this issue, it cannot be said in either case that the government is held accountable to the residents in the proposed construction sites and the surrounding area nor has made a sufficient attempt to form a consensus.

We should remember that it is the residents who were the victims of the disaster that should lead the recovery efforts.

Toshiyuki Takeuchi: Executive Director of Fukushima Beacon for Global Citizens Network (Fukuden)

Background Facts

Amount of Designated Waste in 6 Prefectures



Translated and Edited by Fukuden based on the official data released by Ministry of the Environment As of Sep. 30th, 2015. (Japanese)

http://shiteihaiki.env.go.jp/radiological_contaminated_waste/designated_waste/

About this news letter

Stories & Facts from Fukushima is a newsletter presenting real stories of Fukushima and its background after the nuclear disaster of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant happened on Mar.11, 2011.

Having more than 4 years passed since the disaster, this newsletter aims to introduce present situation of Fukushima people (both

living inside and outside Fukushima) and to explain the facts behind their life.

Some of the contents are linked to our website, Fukushima on the Globe (www.fukushimaonthe-globe.com). Please see the site as well as this newsletter.

We welcome your feedback.

Acknowledgement

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2F, Kasuga Bldg, 9-22 Soneda-cho,
Fukushima city, Fukushima 960-8051, Japan
Tel: +81-24-573-1470 Fax: +81-24-573-1471
E-mail: info@fukushimabeacon.net
URL: www.fukushimabeacon.net

Our English website:
Fukushima on the Globe
URL: www.fukushimaonthe-globe.com