

Gov't body plans to dispose of uranium-contaminated soil in U.S.

(Kyodo) _ A governmental nuclear research and development organization plans to ship soil contaminated with uranium from Yurihama, Tottori Prefecture, to the United States for disposal, informed sources said Sunday.

Of the 3,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil in the town's Katamo district, 290 cubic meters, with a relatively high surface radiation level, will be shipped by the Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute, the sources said.

According to the institute's plan, a U.S. firm will dispose of the soil in the United States at a total cost of more than 600 million yen, they said, adding it remains to be seen what will be done with the remaining 2,700 cubic meters of soil.

The plan, if realized, will open the way for a solution to a long-standing legal row between the local community and the institute, the sources said.

The soil originated from test-drilling of uranium by the institute's predecessor, the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation, around Ningyo Pass on the border of Tottori and Okayama prefectures in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was revealed in August 1988 that the soil had been left behind in Yurihama's Katamo district, triggering an outcry from the local community.

In November 2000, the Katamo community association filed a lawsuit with the Tottori District Court urging the institute to clear the soil.

The court order was upheld and finalized by the Supreme Court in October 2004 after a protracted legal battle between the two sides.

Also the same year, the Tottori District Court ordered the institute to clear the soil by March 10 this year and pay 750,000 yen per day if the deadline is missed.

Although the institute unveiled a plan in February to temporarily keep the soil at its waste dumping site at another location in Yurihama, the Tottori prefectural government blocked the move in line with its ordinance administering prefecture-designated natural parks.

The institute immediately filed a suit seeking a court injunction of the ban. It has been paying 750,000 yen per day to the local community since its failure to remove the soil by the court-set deadline of March 10.