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Flimsy waste tanks cause new delay in Fukushima plant decontamination

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THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tanks designed to hold radioactive filtrate at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are proving too fragile to be used, and the operator has announced a further delay in starting up machinery that cleans contaminated water.

Multinuclide removal equipment was originally slated to begin operation at the plant in September. But on Dec. 25, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said vessels that receive the machinery's radioactive discharge were failing drop tests and could not be relied upon.

Officials said reinforcing the tanks and testing them anew will take some time, so they are unable to predict when the equipment may finally come online.

The vessels are hoisted and lowered as they are filled and replaced by empty containers. In the event of an accident, they need to be strong enough to withstand a fall without releasing their radioactive contents.

TEPCO confirmed that the vessels could sustain a fall from a height of 6 meters in an upright position. But tests found the tanks were breaking and spilling their contents when dropped on from a height of only 3 meters in an upside-down position.

The findings were presented to a joint council on the mid- to long-term decommissioning of nuclear reactors, a body comprising government representatives and TEPCO officials.

The council decided that TEPCO should reinforce the vessel design and then hold more tests. TEPCO hopes to be ready to perform the tests in January.

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