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## Radiation-shielding sheets to be installed in Sept. at earliest

TOKYO, April 6, Kyodo

A plan to cover damaged reactor buildings at the crisis-hit Fukushima nuclear plant with special sheets to halt radiation leakage cannot offer a quick remedy, as the sheeting will be installed in September at the earliest due to high-level radioactivity hampering work at the site, government sources said Tuesday.

The government had asked Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima Daiichi power station crippled by the March 11 quake and tsunami, to study the installment of radiation-shielding sheets, and a major construction firm commissioned to examine the idea said the construction will not start until June, the sources told Kyodo News.

They said workers need to wait until radiation levels drop at the site, where hydrogen explosions have blown away the roofs and upper walls of three reactor buildings.

Some nuclear experts have been skeptical about the feasibility of the plan as they believe the step would have only limited effects in blocking the release of radioactive substances into the environment.

In a meeting Tuesday of a team tasked with halting the leakage of radioactive substances from the plant under a task force set up by the government and the operator known as TEPCO, the construction firm gave prospects for the work schedule, the sources said.

At the gathering, a specialist from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission said the structure of the special sheets should guarantee that spent nuclear fuel pools in the reactor buildings will not be damaged even if the sheeting is toppled by quakes or typhoons, according to the sources.

Specialists in the government are planning to stem possible surges in radiation levels or further explosions in the reactor buildings to be wrapped by the sheets, by attaching materials that absorb radioactive materials to the inner side of the sheeting and installing air vents with filters to let out hydrogen, they said.

At the plant, TEPCO has been spraying water-soluble resin that has a coating effect to prevent radioactive particles from being dispersed by wind and rain. But the resin does not have effects to shield radiation.

The costs of building framed structures around the Nos. 1-4 reactor buildings and wrapping them with the special sheets are estimated to reach 80 billion yen.

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