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## Blowback Over Japanese Plan to Reuse Tainted Soil From Fukushima

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By [Brian Yap](#)

Japan's plan to reuse soil contaminated with radiation from the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant accident for agriculture is sparking something of its own nuclear reaction.

Residents and other critics don't want any part of it.

"Pollutants contained in crops will surely pollute air, water and soil, thereby contaminating food to be consumed by human beings," Kazuki Kumamoto, professor emeritus at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo told Bloomberg Environment. Contaminated crops "could trigger the release of radiation."

The Ministry of the Environment released its [latest plan](#) June 3 for reusing the soil as part of a decontamination project associated with the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. The accident occurred after a tsunami disabled the facility's power supply and caused its emergency generators to fail, leading to meltdowns in three reactors, hydrogen-air explosions, and the release of radioactive material.

The ministry's plan calls for using the soil to develop farmland in Fukushima Prefecture for horticultural crops that won't be consumed by humans, the June 3 document said. It builds on the ministry's 2017 plan to use the contaminated soil for road construction.

Japan enacted a law in 2011 to respond to the Fukushima accident that provides for post-disaster measures and enables the government to reuse contaminated waste for public works and other purposes, with roads themselves being disposal sites, Osamu Inoue, environmental law partner at Ushijima & Partners in Tokyo, told Bloomberg BNA.

## Safety issues

The reuse projects for road construction and agricultural land have met heavy opposition from residents living close to where such projects have been planned, according to Akira Nagasaki, environmental law partner at City-Yuwa Partners in Tokyo.

Key among their concerns are the changes Japan made to its benchmark.

Contaminated soil isn't classified as nuclear waste under the law and therefore isn't required to be treated by special facilities, Kumamoto said. That's because Japan relaxed its benchmark, based on one set by the International Atomic Energy Agency, for determining at what level of contamination radioactive waste must be treated and disposed using more protective measures.

The international agency standard is 100 becquerel, a measure of radioactivity, per kilogram. Japan revised its limit to 8,000 becquerel per kilogram for nuclear waste and soil, exempting a greater amount of contaminated soil from strict treatment requirements and allowing it to be reused for public works projects and agricultural land.

"The relaxed benchmark is one factor triggering safety concerns among residents," Nagasaki told Bloomberg Environment June 8. He added that the government has been promoting its plan to put contaminated soil back to earth, which seems contrary to the former process of removing it.

"The government is saying that the contaminated soil will be covered by materials such as concrete, effectively

reducing radiation levels, but many residents near the reuse projects aren't convinced," he said.

The government's original scheme set in 2012, Kumamoto said, was to have the contaminated areas in Fukushima Prefecture completely cleaned up in 30 years, with the tainted soil that had been temporarily stored offsite moved to interim storage facilities near the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Plant.

Thirty-six of the prefecture's 59 cities and townships are included in the government's decontamination plan, environment ministry statistics show. Contaminated soil temporarily stored outside the areas closest to the Fukushima No. 1 plant was supposed to have been moved to interim storage facilities on land nearest the nuclear site by 2015 and kept there for 30 years.

### Unfair Compensation

Another concern is how the government plans to compensate the owners of the land where these sites would be located.

Most of the more than 2,300 property owners in the area have refused to sell their land to the government for the storage sites because they don't think they're being fairly compensated, said Yoshiharu Monma, chairman of the Association of Landowners in Fukushima Prefecture.

The government agreed to compensate the owners for what the land was worth before the 2011 disaster if that property was to be used for the temporary storage sites, Monma said. But if the land has been designated for interim storage



facilities, the government will only pay half of its value before the disaster.

"This is totally unfair and, as much as the landowners are willing to sell their land to facilitate the government's decontamination plans, they won't do so until the government fixes such compensation discrepancies," Monma added.

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