

FUKUSHIMA NUCLEAR WATER TO BE RELEASED VIA UNDERSEA TUNNEL

Relevant for: Current Affairs | Topic: Nuclear science

A file photo of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Okuma town. ApHiro Komae

The operator of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant said on Wednesday it plans to build an undersea tunnel so that massive amounts of treated but still radioactive water can be released into the ocean about 1 km away from the plant to avoid interference with local fishing.

The operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, said it hopes to start releasing the water in spring 2023. TEPCO says hundreds of storage tanks at the plant need to be removed to make room for facilities necessary for the plant's decommissioning.

An official, Junichi Matsumoto, said TEPCO will construct the undersea tunnel by drilling through bedrock in the seabed near its No. 5 reactor, which survived the meltdowns at the plant, to minimise possible underground contamination or leakage of radioactive ground water into the tunnel. Radioactive water has been stored in about 1,000 tanks at the Fukushima Daiichi plant since 2011, when a massive earthquake and tsunami damaged three reactors and their cooling water became contaminated and began leaking.

The government decided in April to start discharging the water, after further treatment and dilution, into the Pacific Ocean in spring 2023 under safety standards set by regulators, a move opposed by fishermen and neighbouring countries.

Under the new plan, the water will be released at a depth of about 12 m below the ocean's surface, said Mr. Matsumoto.

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