

The Road to 2045

20 Years Left in the Interim Storage

Seven members of Journalism School – Team 2 visited the Interim Storage Facility located between Okuma Town and Futaba Town. Guided by a public relations officer from the managing company, they toured the Okuma side of the facility and also visited the Interim Storage Information Center in the town.

The facility stores soil and other materials containing radioactive substances caused by the nuclear accident. By law, these materials must be moved outside Fukushima Prefecture for final disposal within the next 20 years. However, understanding of how to reuse the removed soil and how final disposal will be done is still limited.



Radiation levels actually measured on the removed soil

Scars of the Disaster Still Remain

The facility stretches eight kilometers from north to south and two kilometers from east to west, on the east side of National Route 6.

According to Mr. Hiroaki Chiba of the Japan Environmental Storage & Safety Corporation (JESCO), about 14 million cubic meters of soil have been transported to the site so far, and about 12 million cubic meters are currently being stored.

All around, small hills of soil have formed where more soil has been piled on top of the removed soil. Wearing long sleeves, masks, gloves, and helmets, we held dosimeters and listened carefully to the explanation.

The area used to be filled with farmland and industrial parks, but now it is covered with trees and grass—its old appearance gone.

Inside the facility area stands the remains of the Prefectural Aquaculture Research Center, which used to face the ocean and culture fish such as flounder. It still shows the scars of the tsunami: half

of its roof is missing, and even the road signs are bent.

The remains of the nursing home Sunlight Okuma are also still on its grounds in the same condition as right after the earthquake and nuclear accident. On a nearby road sits a rusted vehicle belonging to no one in particular, and inside the building, tables, chairs, and shards of glass lie scattered about.

Before visiting the storage facility, we went to the Interim Storage Information Center, which opened on March 15, 2025. The center provides information and exhibits about the project. In Okuma and Futaba—host towns of TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station—new facilities and roads are being built one after another. Fourteen years have passed since the disaster. We could see some places changing while others remain unchanged.



Remains of the Fukushima Prefectural Fisheries Seed Research Institute, which was destroyed by the tsunami



TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, seen from a hilltop



Measuring radiation levels at a storage site for removed soil

Interview with Mr. Hiroaki Chiba

Deputy Manager,
Regional Cooperation and Public
Relations Section
Interim Storage Management Center,
JESCO



Q: Were you afraid to work in a job related to radioactive materials?

A: I had studied about them before and knew it was safe, so I wasn't afraid.

Q: How many people work at the Information Center, and what do they do?

A: There are 26 staff members. We guide visitors around the facility and create promotional videos.

Q: What was this area like before the disaster?

A: There used to be houses and shops. Nearby was a hospital and a train station—it was the center of town. It used to be designated as a Difficult-to-return Zones, but after decontamination, residents are now able to live here again.

Q: How do you stay connected with local residents?

A: We record interviews, share stories and old photos, and try to keep the memories of local people alive. We want to continue valuing their experiences.

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“Only about 20% of people outside the prefecture say they would accept the reuse of the removed soil,” Mr. Chiba told us.

The Interim Storage Facility began receiving removed soil in 2015, marking 10 years this year. By law, all materials must be transferred outside the prefecture for final disposal by 2045. The government has decided that soil with low radiation levels can be reused, and some has already been used at the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo.

However, Mr. Chiba also shared that when they proposed using some of the soil in flowerbeds in Tokyo, the plan was opposed.

He emphasized, “I want young people to visit this place, learn about the reality of the interim storage, and share what they learned on social media. I hope more and more people will understand.” Many students from outside the prefecture now visit the Information Center, and they are beginning to understand that the soil is safe to reuse.

Mr. Chiba also mentioned the local residents whose families have lived here for generations and who agreed to provide their land for the facility.

“Our mission is to advance together toward the final deadline set by law. That's our promise with everyone in the town,” he said with determination.