Areva to set up treatment system at Japan plant

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Areva SA CEO Anne Lauvergeon speaks to the press in Tokyo. French nuclear group Areva said Tuesday it will set up a system to treat radioactive water from a quake-hit Japanese power plant to allow power supplies and cooling systems to be repaired.

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The 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that hit the northeast coast of Japan on March 11 knocked out power systems at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, causing cooling systems to fail and triggering a series of explosions.

To prevent a nuclear catastrophe, crews have pumped thousands of tonnes of seawater and later freshwater into the reactors and pools, creating a massive amount of radioactive runoff that is now hindering crucial repair work.

Areva will use a system designed to separate radioactive substances out of the contaminated water, the company's chief executive Anne Lauvergeon told a news conference in Tokyo.

"This is a mechanism to treat contamination. We will inject chemicals into the contaminated water that will cause the radioactive substances to separate out," she said, without giving any further details.

Areva said it had been working with the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), which runs the Fukushima Daiichi plant, for three weeks to try to come up with a decontamination system.

Tens of thousands of people living near the 1970s-era plant have been forced to evacuate their homes as radiation has leaked into the air, soil and sea in the wake of the disaster.

TEPCO said Sunday it hopes to reduce radiation leaking from the plant in three months and to achieve "cold shutdowns" of all reactors within six to nine months.

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