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Italian businessman dumped North Korean nuclear waste in ocean near Taiwan

Environmental groups demand investigation

By [Matthew Strong](#), Taiwan News, Staff Writer

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(By Associated Press)

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) – An Italian businessman dumped radioactive nuclear waste in the ocean near Taiwan in the 1990s, according to documents from an Italian intelligence service declassified Wednesday.

The information was contained in 61 documents from SISMI, an Italian military intelligence department, which were submitted to an Italian parliamentary investigation commission, according to the Italian media.

The reports named Giorgio Comerio as a businessman who made a fortune by sending ships loaded with nuclear and other dangerous materials to the bottom of the sea in the Mediterranean and near Somalia and Taiwan.

Comerio began collaborating closely with the government of North Korea around 1995, the documents said. In return for the payment of US\$227 million (NT\$7 billion), he disposed of 200,000 barrels of radioactive waste, whose final resting place must be the ocean near Taiwan, according to SISMI.

Taiwanese environmental groups demanded the government launch an investigation of its own into the allegations and conduct tests to determine whether the dumping of waste had impacted Taiwan's environment and the condition of the ocean. The government should also find out the precise location where the Italian company dumped the waste, activists said. The Cabinet's Atomic Energy Council replied it was not aware of the practice described in the SISMI documents.

Between 1989 and 1995, an estimated 90 ships carrying nuclear waste were sunk in the Mediterranean, and as recently as 2003, the intelligence service presented a report to the Italian government saying that two ships loaded with industrial waste and other toxic materials had arrived in the Somali capital Mogadishu.

Two reporters from Italian state broadcasting network RAI who were investigating similar deals were killed in Somalia, leading to parliamentarians pressuring the government to release more documents about the transportation of dangerous waste products.