

Joint Energy and Environment Council Looks toward Plan to Achieve Kyoto Targets

On November 18, the joint energy and environment council of the Industrial Structure Council and the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy met to consider a process for meeting commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. Regarding nuclear power, it was pointed out that while the safe operation of reactors is essential, another factor to be considered is the compatibility between the deregulation of the electric power market and the promotion of nuclear power.

With the Kyoto Protocol coming into effect in February 2005, the Japanese government will issue a plan to achieve its targets before the end of the current fiscal year. The plan will be created based on existing Climate Change Policy Program. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) hopes to achieve greenhouse-gas emissions reductions without increasing taxes. The process for meeting the commitments, proposed at the joint meeting, includes fundamentally reinforcing the Energy Conservation Law and carrying out "concrete measures" to achieve reduction targets without increasing taxes.

According to METI, Japan's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2003 were 8% above the level of 1990. Of that figure, however, 4.9% was due to the long periods of suspended operation at the nuclear power plants (NPPs) of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), owing to a data-falsification scandal. The real level was thus 3.1% above 1990 levels, or 9.1% above Japan's target (i.e., 6% below 1990 levels) under the Kyoto Protocol. In only current measures are implemented, emissions in 2010 would be some 3.2% to 5% above 1990 levels. That means that additional reductions of 6.1% to 7.9% would be required to meet the targets, based on the further assumption of 3.1% via carbon-sink measures, as calculated provisionally by the Forestry Agency.

The government intends to implement such additional measures as fundamentally shoring up the Energy Conservation Law, making additional reductions in the use of alternative CFCs, and fully applying the Kyoto mechanisms. The plan is premised on the stable operation of NPPs, which have shown their effectiveness in achieving their targets. Namely, the emissions in 2002 and 2003 could have been 2.3 and 4.9 points lower, respectively, had certain NPPs not been suspended so long.

In addition to that point, members at the meeting, including Chairman Hajime Sasaki of the Committee on Environmental and Energy Issues of the Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives), and Pres. Jitsuro Terashima of the Japan Research Institute, noted the importance of clarifying the significance of nuclear power from a long-term point of view. Another member, Commissioner Noriko Kimoto of the Atomic Energy Commission, stated, "We should consider nuclear power in light of the possibility of the increased use of fossil fuel as a result of the deregulated electricity market."

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