

Aomori, Rokkasho, JNFL Ink Safety Agreement Prior to Uranium Testing

On November 22, a safety agreement dealing with the uranium testing at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant of Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL) was signed by Aomori Prefecture, Rokkasho Village (Rokkasho-mura), and JNFL, and witnessed by a representative from the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC). The signing took place at a hotel in Aomori City, and was attended by Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura, Rokkasho Mayor Kenji Furukawa, JNFL President Isami Kojima, FEPC Chairman Yosaku Fuji, and several others.

JNFL will also conclude similar agreements with six municipalities adjacent to Rokkasho, and expects to begin the testing in late December or early January. The implementation of uranium testing – which has been repeatedly postponed – will mark a major step forward for the reprocessing plant.

At the signing, Gov. Mimura announced, "We have concluded the agreement after carefully focusing on the safety of our citizens and their feeling of security. I strongly urge JNFL to do its utmost, with a full sense of responsibility, mission and 'constructive tension,' to gain the confidence of the people." Next, Mayor Furukawa asked the company "to make concerted efforts to recover confidence in nuclear power and to create a sense of security among the citizens." JNFL's Kojima responded by saying, "This move represents a great step toward the operation of the reprocessing plant, and we have renewed our determination to do our utmost, with a sense of mission."

At present, JNFL aims to start active testing (after the uranium testing) in November 2005, and then hopes to complete the reprocessing plant in July 2006. Compared with the projections outlined in the latest formal modification of the plan issued in September 2003, only half the time now needs to be taken from the start of the uranium testing to the intended completion of the plant. Additional matters must therefore be considered carefully, such as the scheduled time of completion, based on the progress of the testing and other factors.

In June 2004, Aomori Prefecture finally proposed a draft safety agreement, which was then considered at informal meetings held by all the members of the prefectural assembly and the prefectural nuclear policy colloquium. In the same month, also, the Atomic Energy Commission's new long-term program council initiated discussions on nuclear fuel cycle policy. Under those circumstances, JNFL kept its application for permission to change the plan filed with METI, postponing the start of uranium testing month by a month, with the expectation that it would commence soon.

The movement toward a conclusion of the safety agreement accelerated immediately after the council decided on November 12 to continue the policy of reprocessing all spent fuel. Three days later, the Council on Nuclear Fuel Cycle convened a meeting, attended by Gov. Mimura and related cabinet ministers, at which the prefecture received governmental confirmation of the nuclear



JNFL's Rokkasho Facilities

fuel-cycle policy.

On November 18, then, Aomori prefectural representatives met with JNFL Pres. Kojima and Deputy Director-General Hisao Ida of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA). After again confirming their efforts to ensure safety, the prefecture suggested entering into a safety agreement. The next day, JNFL told the prefecture that it would accept the draft agreement. The signing at a hotel in Aomori City was attended by Governor Shingo Mimura of Aomori Prefecture, Mayor Kenji Furukawa of Rokkasho-mura, JNFL President Isami Kojima, FEPC Chairman Yosaku Fuji and others.

METI, FEPC Heads Comment on Safety Agreement

After the signing of the agreement on November 22, Shoichi Nakagawa, head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), released the following informal comments on the conclusion of the safety agreement: "I view the action as a major step forward toward the operation of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, as well as toward the eventual establishment of a nuclear fuel cycle business in this country. METI will continue its efforts to complete the nuclear fuel cycle based on the Basic Energy Plan, and obtain understanding from the people, always on the premise of first ensuring safety."

FEPC released its own informal comments on the same day: "We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Gov. Mimura, Mayor Furukawa and everyone involved. We will continue to work with JNFL toward the commencement operation of the reprocessing plant, with unwavering resolve to have MOX fuel used at 16 to 18 NPPs nationwide by FY2010."

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