

Report Issued on Measures to Protect Reactors against Armed Military or Terrorist Attacks

On December 3, a report was issued by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), along with the Cabinet Secretariat's Special Committee on Nuclear Facility Protection Measures in Emergencies, explaining emergency measures to be taken in the event of an armed attack against Japan, including a major terrorist event. They included procedures to shut down nuclear power plants (NPPs) and maintain a stable supply of electric power during such a situation.

The report states, "In order to protect nuclear facilities during emergencies or similar situations, it is important to suspend reactor operation promptly, and to terminate criticality. To those ends, it is necessary to discuss in advance the procedures for shutting down the reactors in such circumstances, as well as the expected effects on the supply and demand of electricity."

It was with that recognition that NISA and the Cabinet Secretariat, which are responsible for emergency responses, jointly established the special committee in February 2004. Consisting of members from related ministries and agencies, concerned local municipalities and electric power companies, the committee has deliberated three issues so far: (1) protective measures, (2) when and how the reactors should be shut down, and (3) effects on electric power supply.

Regarding the procedures to be implemented in shutting down reactors, the report says, "In emergencies or similar situations, the government will, in principle, receive information and ascertain the threat on a centralized basis. Once an unforeseen situation has occurred, all the related organizations will take the necessary actions to cope with it according to the type of threat perceived by the government."

Specifically, if the government believes an armed attack against Japan is imminent, it will issue a warning, and the electric power companies will prepare to suspend their nuclear reactor operations and move to ensure substitute power sources. If the country is actually attacked, the government will order the electric power companies to shut down their reactors. If a threat arises unexpectedly, especially one of paramount urgency, the companies are entitled to halt their reactors at their own discretion, in accordance with ordinary procedures for emergency situations, without the government's recognition thereof or any direct orders thereto.

As for ways to secure an adequate power supply in the event of reactor shutdown, the report says the electric power companies ought to activate substitute power sources, and/or accommodate other electric power companies, so as to ensure necessary electricity. It goes on to state, "The government will do its utmost to ensure a stable supply of electricity, requiring that the electric power companies provide the electric power necessary to stabilize people's lives. The public will also be asked to refrain from using nonessential electricity or limit its use."

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