

TEPCO Reiterates Request to Aomori Prefecture for Siting Cooperation

Regarding the spent fuel interim storage facility (referred to as the "recyclable fuel storage center") that Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) wants to build in Mutsu City (Aomori Pref.), and to have operational by 2010, TEPCO Pres. Tsunehisa Katsumata visited Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura on December 16 to repeat his request for the prefecture's cooperation in siting the facility.

In February 2004, TEPCO had similarly asked the governor for his cooperation. The prefecture's attention, however, was then focused on the uranium testing planned at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant of the Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL), and it thus held off from making a response to TEPCO's request. Addressing an issue of particular concern, Pres. Katsumata clearly stated, "TEPCO promises to remove all the spent fuel from the facility, without fail, five decades after the facility starts operating."

At the meeting, Katsumata said that TEPCO would like to make Mutsu the site of its first interim storage facility, and he asked for the prefecture's cooperation. Referring to an interim report on a new Long-term Program for Nuclear Research, Development and Utilization, compiled by the Atomic Energy Commission in November, he spoke of the significance of the interim storage facility, saying, "It is clearly stated [in the report] that the portion of spent fuel beyond the capacity of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant will be stored for the time being - stressing the importance of interim storage again."

When Gov. Mimura pressed him further on what would happen to the spent fuel after the period of interim storage, Katsumata said, "I promise to take it out of the facility. If necessary, we will consider putting that down in writing in very clear terms." He also said TEPCO would strive further to help the residents of the city and neighboring municipalities better understand the project.

Saying there was nothing for him to say, the governor then avoided saying anything concrete, such as on the process for addressing the matter.

At the Mutsu City Assembly in June 2003, Mayor Masashi Sugiyama of Mutsu expressed his intention to invite the interim storage facility to the city. In February 2004, TEPCO asked the prefecture and the city for their cooperation in siting the facility, but their responses were put on hold when inappropriate construction at the reprocessing facility came to light.

The prefecture will establish a special committee in January to start considering whether to accept the storage facility. It will also ask for an informal "all-members" meeting of the prefectural assembly, and a meeting of the prefectural nuclear policy colloquium.



Conceptual drawing of the recyclable fuel storage center

Editor: Noriyuki Ishii, JAIF