

Global Warming Measures: Nuclear Energy Is Key in Electric Power Sector

On December 16, the fourth meeting was held of the Resources and Energy Working Group under the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy's Joint Subcommittee for Following Up on Voluntary Actions, to address progress on global warming measures carried out by six industries related to resources and energy.

According to the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC), the electric power sector has fallen slightly behind in its outlook for attaining CO₂ emissions reduction targets. By FY2010, the sector had set a users' target of per-unit emissions – i.e., the amount of CO₂ emissions divided by the amount of electricity used – equivalent to a 20% reduction (0.34kg-CO₂/kWh) from FY1990 levels. But the FY2010 outlook, calculated on a trial basis based on the electricity supply plan for the current fiscal year (FY2004), showed reductions of about 15%.

According to FEPC, had some nuclear power plants (NPPs) not suspended operations for lengthy periods in FY2003, and had overall capacity factor been maintained at 84.1% (compared with the actual 59.7%), Japan's total CO₂ emissions would have been reduced by about 5%, equivalent to 60 million tons of CO₂.

FEPC also announced revised measures for the electric power sector, including the further promotion of nuclear power generation, improvements to efficiency in thermal generation, and the utilization of Kyoto Mechanisms, all premised on ensured safety and the recovery of trust.

After hearing from FEPC, the working group members then voiced their opinions. Pres. Yoshikazu Sasaoka of the Federation of Electric Power-related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan said, "To achieve the same high level of availability as is found in the U.S., rational and scientific regulations are required. For that, the national government must give its support, in terms of regulation and adjustments with local communities." Next, Prof. Yoji Inaba of Nihon University declared, "We want nuclear energy to do its best, but a distinction must be made between points involving a basis of safety and others applying to 'operations.'" Lastly, Chairman Mitsuo Kono of the research group, Naigai Joho Kenkyu-kai, stated, "Strict regulation was required because of the electric power utilities' own accidents and mishaps. Deregulation is difficult, and will take time. It is, however, necessary to discuss rational regulation."

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