

Second Round of Examinations Approve MOX-use Program at Genkai-3

On August 29, the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) concluded that safety would be ensured in the MOX-use program at Genkai-3 NPS (PWR, 1,180MW) of the Kyushu Electric Power Co., and issued a report to that effect to the head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). At its regular meeting on August 30, also, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) reported to the METI minister that the program was appropriate from the viewpoint of peaceful nuclear utilization. Now that the two commissions have completed their examinations, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) is expected to soon approve the MOX-use program and the application for permission to change the reactor installation. After obtaining agreements from the local municipalities, Kyushu Electric Power aims to commence MOX fuel use by FY2010 (which starts on April 1, 2010).

The NSC did not refer the examination of Genkai-3 to its Committee on the Examination of Reactor Safety, as it had in the cases of two other PWRs of the same type as Genkai-3: the Takahama-3 and -4. Instead, it directly carried out the examination and deliberations itself. The NSC concluded that "after careful examination, consideration of previous cases and the latest technological information, safety will be ensured with the loading of MOX fuel." It thus decided to concur with the result of the primary examination by NISA, namely, that the MOX-use program at Genkai-3 was appropriate.

This was the fifth report that the NSC has issued on a MOX-use program. The others were for Takahama-3 & -4 of the Kansai Electric Power Co., and Fukushima I-3 and Kashiwazaki Kariwa-3 of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). The NSC is currently carrying out a safety examination on Ikata-3 of the Shikoku Electric Power Co., at the request of NISA.

In May 2004, under existing safety agreements, Kyushu Electric Power submitted petitions to Saga Prefecture and Genkai Town for preliminary consent to its MOX-use program. At the same time, it filed with NISA an application for permission to change a reactor installation. In February 2005, NISA completed its primary examination, which it then asked the two commissions to double check.

Japan's electric power industry plans to implement MOX use at 16 to 18 reactors by FY2010. However, even at this date, MOX fuel has yet to be used anywhere in the country in the wake of accidents and mishaps by Kansai Electric Power and TEPCO.

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