

NISA Approves MOX Loading at Genkai-3

On September 7, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) issued an approval to change a reactor installation, required under the Reactor Regulation Law, for the MOX-use program of the Kyushu Electric Power Co. at its Genkai-3 NPS (PWR, 1,180MW). The power company hopes to implement the program by FY2010, which begins on April 1, 2010. Responses from Saga Prefecture, Genkai Town and other local municipalities will be the focus from now on. Kyushu Electric is the third company, following Kansai Electric Power Co. and the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), to whom the government has issued an approval for a MOX-use program.

Hiroshi Taniguchi, manager of Kyushu Electric's Tokyo Branch, visited METI on September 7 on behalf of company President Shingo Matsuo, and received the written approval from NISA Director General Kenkichi Hirose, who had just assumed office. Pres. Matsuo had originally planned to come, but was busy heading up efforts at the company headquarters for restoration measures after the damage by Typhoon No. 14.

Director General Hirose asked the branch manager to "do your best, but ensure safety as well." Taniguchi replied, "We will await the final judgment of the local municipalities, and then make our best efforts to advance the plan steadily, doing our utmost to see that safety always comes first." On the same day, Pres. Matsuo released a comment, which read: "We will pursue the implementation of MOX-use step-by-step, while ensuring safety – as we have so far – and striving to obtain understanding and cooperation from the local communities."



NISA Director General delivering the written approval. Branch Manager Taniguchi on the right.

In May 2004, Kyushu Electric filed requests under existing safety agreements with Saga Prefecture and Genkai Town, where the Genkai NPS is located, for their preliminary consents to its MOX-use program. At the same time, it filed an application for permission to change a reactor installation with NISA, which completed its safety examination by February, determining that loading MOX fuel at Genkai-3 would be appropriate. The power company then asked the Nuclear Safety Commission and the Atomic Energy Commission to double-check its conclusion, and both commissions reported affirmatively at the end of August. As NISA obtained the agreement from the head of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) on September 2, the permission to change the reactor installation was issued in the name of the METI minister.

At Genkai-3, up to 48 MOX-fuel assemblies will be loaded as part of replacement fuel, and will account for up to one-fourth of the entire core. Attention will now shift to agreements by the local municipalities on the implementation of the program.

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