

FEPC Makes Specific Proposal to Improve NPP Capacity Factor

At a September 28 meeting of the Nuclear Power Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy, the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC) presented a specific proposal to maximize the use of Japan's existing nuclear power plants (NPPs), taking a cue from the rebound of nuclear power in the United States.

With the overriding premise of securing safety, Japan's electric power industry thus expressed its intention to upgrade the operational maintenance of its NPPs through the expansion of supervisory maintenance and other measures. Simultaneously, FEPC asked the Japan Nuclear Technology Institute (JANTI), an industrial group, for an objective evaluation of their data collection and organization. In addition, they requested the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), a regulatory authority, to create a forum for an appropriate debate about the future shape of streamlined inspections.

At the September 28th meeting, Chubu Electric Vice President Takahiko Ito spoke as the representative of FEPC as he explained how Japan's capacity factor has remained stuck in the 80% percentile since the latter half of the 1990s, while those in Europe and America reached the 90% percentile. He went on to analyze the difference in the average operational and inspections times between Japan and other countries, and suggested the possibility that workers' dosage amounts could be lowered. In addition, he pointed out the division of responsibility in the United States among (1) industrial groups such as the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) and the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), (2) the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which acts as the main regulatory organization, and (3) the power utilities.

Furthermore, Ito expressed his opinion that in order to improve Japan's operation and maintenance of NPPs, it was necessary to expand supervisory and online maintenance – i.e., to get a grasp of the status of equipment during operation – as well as to utilize risk information, and to make the continued operation period more flexible. In particular, he indicated the possibility that expanded supervisory and online maintenance would enable more fine-tuned maintenance during facility operation. At the same time, he also said that standardizing the amount of work done throughout the year during inspections would lead to a more stable employment situation for local workers.

From the perspective of economy and global warming countermeasures, most of the committee members concurred with Ito's findings. However, some pointed out the anxiety concerning such matters as the impact on local employment and safety.

FEPC lastly provided specific information, to be used as reference material, about the current status of developments in seven categories, as well as future responses to be taken. They are as follows: (1) carrying out measures to deal with aging reactors, (2) enacting scientific safety regulations that employ risk information, (3) making the national government's inspection duties more appropriate, and updating the inspection system, (4) giving information to locals about the effectiveness of regulatory activities, (5) improving maintenance management and inspections, (6) expanding supervisory and online maintenance, and (7) increasing rated output.

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