

Aomori Governor Gets Confirmation of National and Industry Attitudes on Interim Storage Facility

On October 7 in Tokyo, Governor Shingo Mimura of Aomori Prefecture met separately with Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda, Shoichi Nakagawa, head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and President Tsunehisa Katsumata of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and concurrently Chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC), on the matter of siting a spent fuel interim storage facility. After the meetings, Gov. Mimura said, "There are still items to be confirmed and requests to be made." He expressed his intention to make a final decision on the siting after meeting other members of the Council on the Nuclear Fuel Cycle.



Conceptual drawing of the Recyclable Fuel Storage Center, an interim storage facility that TEPCO and JAPC plan to build in Mutsu City.

The governor first visited METI Minister Nakagawa, requesting the following actions be taken as preconditions for his approval: (1) maintaining the nuclear fuel cycle policy and promoting the MOX-use Program, (2) not making the interim storage facility planned in Mutsu City the final disposal site, (3) promoting R&D toward the construction of a second reprocessing plant after the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, (4) further enhancing nuclear safety regulation, and (5) improving PR activities and "listening widely to opinions."

The minister responded by telling the governor that the nuclear fuel cycle was at the heart of energy policy, and that the MOX-use Program would be carried out based on ensured safety. He also explained that the removal of spent fuel from the Mutsu facility was required legally, as it had been stipulated when the application for permission to engage in that business was filed under the Reactor Regulation Law*.

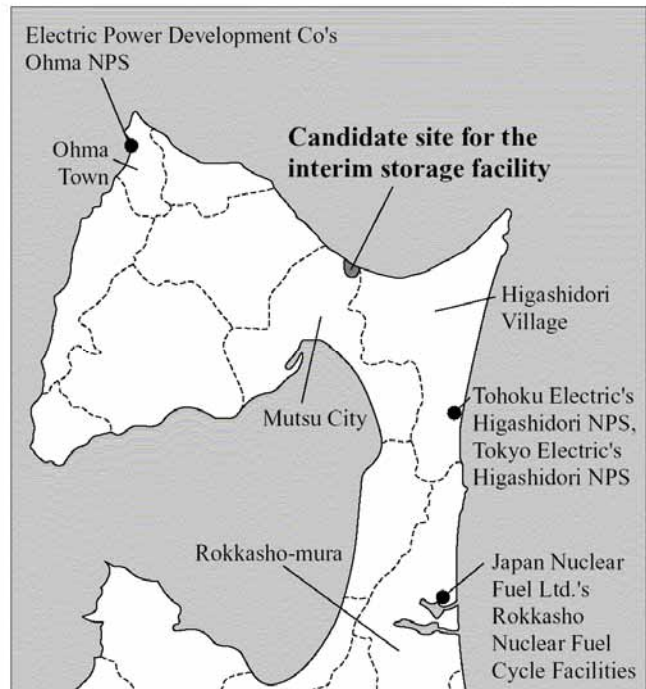
Gov. Mimura requested FEPC Chairman Katsumata to carry out: (1) efforts toward implementing the fuel cycle, (2) promotion of plutonium use and the MOX-use Program, (3) assurances on the removal of spent fuel from the interim storage facility, and (4) quality-assurance activities on the part of the electric power companies. Katsumata answered that the nuclear industry intended to make concerted efforts to carry out nuclear fuel-cycle policy on the basis of reprocessing, expressing a positive attitude on the four points mentioned.

In his meeting with Chief Cabinet Secretary Hosoda, the governor requested the national government to reinforce its efforts to promote the nuclear fuel cycle policy. The secretary indicated that the government would steadily work on it step by step, along the lines of the Energy Policy Basic Law and others.

In July 2003, Mayor Masashi Sugiyama of Mutsu City filed a request for siting an interim storage facility. In February 2004, TEPCO Pres. Katsumata asked Aomori Prefecture and Mutsu City for their cooperation in siting. Responding to that, in January 2005, the prefecture established a safety check investigative commission consisting of various specialists and began discussing whether it should accept the request. In March 2005, that commission reported its conclusion that the interim storage facility presented no safety problem.

As a general matter, the prefecture also refers a nuclear policy-related issue to an informal meeting of the entire prefectural assembly, a colloquium on nuclear policy, a meeting of municipal heads, and explanatory meetings with citizens. The Council on the Nuclear Fuel Cycle – where the governor confirms the consistency of the nuclear administration and the like with relevant national cabinet members – is considered the final stage in comprehensive consideration.

According to the plans of TEPCO and the Japan Atomic Power Company (JAPC), the two organizations will establish a co-financed management company, which will construct a facility capable of storing about 5,000 tons of spent fuel. The facility is to start operating by 2010. Thereafter, negotiations with local governments on shipping the fuel elsewhere are to commence before the 40th year of the facility's operation.



The Fundamental Principles for Nuclear Policy Program (previously called the Long-term Program for Nuclear Research, Development and Utilization), which the Atomic Energy Commission's Long-Term Program Council issued at the end of September, clearly state that a decision on how to handle spent fuel after its interim storage should be made by a time sufficiently prior to the end of operation of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant – clearly limiting the years of storage. Reference in the fundamental principles to a second reprocessing plant, to follow the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant of the Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL), went a step further than the previous long-term nuclear program.

*The Law for the Regulations of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors

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