

Aomori Governor Officially Approves Interim Storage Facility

On October 19, the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the Japan Atomic Power Co. (JAPC) concluded an agreement with Aomori Prefecture and Mutsu City on their cooperation in siting a spent fuel interim storage facility (the Recyclable Fuel Storage Center). At a press conference that morning, Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura officially announced his cooperation with the siting. The governor, together with Mutsu Mayor Masashi Sugiyama, then presented a proposed agreement to TEPCO and JAPC, which was signed the same day. The two firms will establish a new company in a month or so, and begin actual preparatory work for the construction, including filing a license application. The facility is expected to begin operation by 2010.

At the press conference, Gov. Mimura explained his decision, saying, "The facility is essential to promote Japan's basic nuclear fuel cycle policy, and I approved it premised on the safety-first principle." The agreement, by which Aomori and Mutsu consent to the siting, stipulates that the spent fuel be removed before the end of the storage period.

From October 7 to 13, Gov. Mimura had met various Cabinet members and other parties, confirming that the government intended to promote nuclear fuel cycle policy based on reprocessing, and that the interim storage facility would not become a permanent storage site (i.e., a final repository facility). On October 14, the governor called TEPCO Pres. Tsunehisa Katsumata and JAPC Pres. Yukinori Ichida to the Aomori Prefectural Government Office, and obtained their final confirmation that the fuel would be removed within 50 years. He also inquired about the efforts being made in the quality-assurance system. On October 18, then, he called a meeting with the three top prefectural officers and related managers, and decided to approve the facility.

The facility, to be constructed by the new company in the Sekine area of Mutsu City, will have a storage capacity of 5,000-6,000 tons. Both the facility and the metal casks are to be used for 50 years at maximum, and the parties are to discuss the removal of the spent fuel by the 40th year after operation begins. The first structure to be built is a storage building with a 3,000-ton storage capacity, with a second one to follow. The total project will cost about ¥100 billion (\$870 million at \$1=¥115). Some 200-300 tons of spent fuel will be delivered annually, in four installments.

The facility will store spent fuel from the nuclear power plants belonging to both TEPCO and JAPC. Now that the siting of Japan's first interim storage facility has been firmly decided, the siting of similar facilities in other areas, such as Mihama Town in Fukui Prefecture, may make some headway.

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