

JAEA Starts Construction of Horonobe Underground Facility

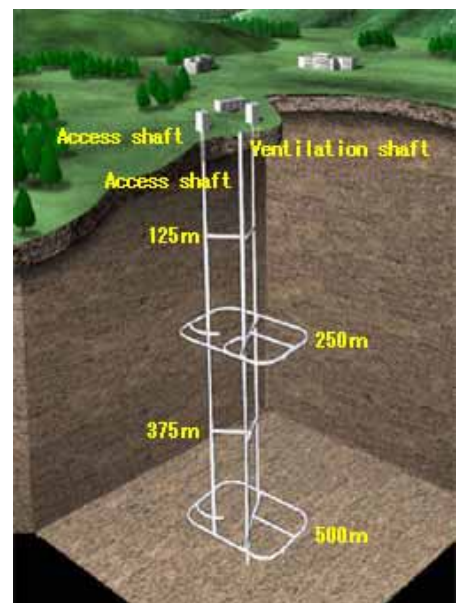
On November 9, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) launched Phase I construction of an underground facility at the Horonobe Underground Research Center, now under construction in Horonobe Town (Hokkaido). Scheduled for completion by the end of FY2008 (i.e., March 31, 2009) are a portion of a horizontal gallery (connecting the ventilation and eastern shafts), two of the three vertical shafts, a ventilation shaft and the eastern shaft (access shaft).

Since FY2000, work related to the construction of the center focused on above-ground investigations and site preparation. Now, with the start of construction of the underground facility, R&D on high-level radioactive waste (HLW) geological disposal technology at the research center moves to the next stage.

The east shaft, to be built in Phase I, will measure 6.5m in diameter and some 280m deep. The ventilation shaft, meanwhile, will be 4.5m in diameter and about 400m deep. The horizontal gallery will be semicircular, measuring 4m wide and 3.6m high. Blasting will be carried out to construct the eastern shaft, while mechanical excavation will be utilized for the ventilation shaft and the horizontal gallery. The next phase of construction, to be launched in FY2009, will involve the construction of the western shaft and the extension of the eastern shaft.

On November 9, prior to the construction, a safety ceremony was held at the site, with Mayor Akira Miyamoto of Horonobe Town, Director Sei-etsu Takeda of the center and others attending. Takeda said, "Without the understanding and support of Horonobe Town and others, the construction could not have been launched, for which we sincerely thank you. In constructing underground facilities, we consider it of utmost importance to do the work while ensuring safety, and to maintain an open system where information is readily available to the public in principle. We will do our utmost to continue enjoying your understanding and support."

JAEA is also constructing a similar underground research facility in Mizunami City (Gifu Pref.), which features different soil and geological formations from that of Horonobe: namely, it has crystalline rock, while Horonobe is sedimentary rock.



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