

JAEA Announces Measures to Improve JMTR Use

On December 27, a committee meeting was held at the Tokyo office of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), exploring ways to improve the usage environment surrounding the Japan Material Testing Reactor (JMTR). There, various ideas were presented about how to deal with the problems in running the JMTR, as raised by members and others in attendance. Also, JAEA said that it would consult with private users about ways to improve the reactor's usability for them. The committee is headed by JAIF Vice Chairman Masao Takuma.

A special committee of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan has already pointed out various ways to enhance JMTR's use, including: (1) shortening turnaround times, (2) decreasing the facility usage fees, (3) simplifying procedures for irradiation and improving usability, and (4) abiding by statutory safety regulations. (See the December 6 article entitled "JAEA Committee Discusses Japan Material Testing Reactor.")

As to the first point, JAEA said that each process would be reviewed individually so as to shorten turnaround times. For example, regarding instrumentation capsules, the turnaround time could be reduced from the current 21 months to 11 months (both maximum times). JAEA also said that facility usage fees, now said to be 40% higher than those at the HFR-Petten reactor in the Netherlands, could be reduced by about 30% if operation and management were streamlined and efficiency improved.

In terms of procedures and convenience, JAEA said that it would establish an "industry-and-academia liaison department" as a conduit for external contacts, toward integrating services and support activities. In addition, a system is to be created whereby persons experienced in irradiation technology would act as coordinators for irradiation experiments, starting with the planning stage of an experiment and continuing through its end. That would include performing irradiation procedures themselves on the behalf of users.

As for safety regulations, JAEA said that the facilities would resume operations earlier than expected after unscheduled suspensions, and would also coordinate more closely with regulatory authorities to improve strict statutory regulations, so as to respond more promptly. It also said that it would work to extend the maximum number of operational days annually from the current 180 days to 240.

Regarding the 8-inch-diameter silicon irradiation injector necessary to produce silicon semiconductors, JAEA is mulling the idea of setting up a special irradiation injector at the south side of the reactor core. Also, in order to ensure appropriate operational cycles at multiple reactors for the purpose of securing a stable supply of homogeneous radioisotopes, the schedules of JMTR, JRR-3 and JRR-4 would be handled by the same office, which would coordinate the periodic inspection periods for the three reactors as well as related facilities, enabling the stable production of radioisotopes.

In addition to the foregoing, JAEA said that it would consider letting a users' council finalize the plan for use of the facilities, and would set up a frequent-user discount system similar to airline's mileage plans.

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