

Differences on New Seismic Guidelines Finally to Be Settled

On August 22, the Nuclear Safety Commission's Subcommittee on the Safety Examination Guidelines for Seismic Design discussed a proposed revision to Japan's "Examination Guide for the Seismic Design of Nuclear Power Plants," taking into account the public's comments on a draft proposal by the subcommittee. Regarding the matter of "standard ground acceleration" in the proposed revision, the subcommittee members have been long engaged in discussions related to the investigation of active faults, and have met four additional times since the proposed revision was made available to the public. At the latest meeting, the secretariat presented its modified proposal, based upon which the opinions of the members are to be integrated and reconciled. The proposal is expected to be finalized at the next meeting of the subcommittee, slated for August 28.

The proposed revision to the Examination Guide was issued by the subcommittee in April. After deliberations and approval by the higher-ranking Special Committee on Nuclear Safety Guidelines and Standards, the proposal was made available to the public for comment from May to June. The most distinctive change from the existing guidelines was the inclusion of standard ground acceleration. That change alone elicited 680 comments, including ones not directly connected to the proposal. Public attendance was strong and media attention high at the Nuclear Safety Commission's recent open deliberations on the issue – often exceeding seating capacity.

At the previous meeting on August 8, the members had argued over various issues, including the ages of active faults to be considered for aseismic design, as well as recent results of an investigation into faults near the Shimane NPS. At the start of the meeting, Chairman Hiroyuki Aoyama had urged the members not to prolong the situation, asking for an early resolution.

Regarding the description of evaluation of faults assumed as an epicenter, the draft proposed by the secretariat modifies the language, for example, adding mention of "an earthquake within an inland crust." Also, as for the classification of the degree of importance in seismic design, the original description of "seismic classes I, II and III" has been changed to "classes S, B and C," in response to comments from the public that confusion should be avoided with equipment classifications in structural design. Although differences of opinion remained among members over the issue of the faults, the meeting adjourned, because the discussion had already gone substantially overtime. Accordingly, it was decided that the views of the members would be integrated, based on the secretariat's proposal, as soon as possible, and confirmed at the meeting to be held on August 28.

At the beginning of the meeting on August 22, NSC Chairman Atsuyuki Suzuki said, "The Japanese people want the aseismic guidelines revised promptly. Putting top priority on people's safety, we, too, want to apply the revised guidelines as soon as possible." He called on the subcommittee to come to a conclusion. He also expressed his view that those opinions not to be reflected in the revised guidelines this time would be kept as points to be noted later when actually applying the guidelines, and would also be referred to as part of the latest knowledge when the guidelines are revised next.

The records of deliberations, along with the studies of comments received from the public, are expected to be maintained as supplemental materials to the subcommittee's report, given the extensive amount of work done over the past five years and the high level of public interest.

Editor: Noriyuki Ishii, JAIF