

Tohoku Electric Power Makes Complete Overhaul of Its Quality Assurance System

On August 23, the Tohoku Electric Power Co. submitted a report to the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) and to local governments concerning the complete overhaul of its nuclear power quality assurance system. It isolated and identified such problems as the lack of leadership by the top management in the area of safety culture, as well as insufficient resources being applied to deal with changes in the operational environment. To deal with the problems at hand, the power utility proclaimed that this would be "Year One" for changing its awareness toward quality assurance at its nuclear power plants (NPPs), and enumerated 17 different countermeasures that would be taken, including the new establishment of a nuclear power assessment division.

The incidents that prompted Tohoku Electric to make a complete overhaul include the insufficient management of piping thickness, the low "C" rating given to the Onagawa-3 NPS during a regular safety management assessment, the inappropriate response made to the problem of flow meters manufactured by Toshiba, and the mistaken insertion of the wrong control rods at Onagawa-2. On July 11, the power utility set up a committee to address the issue of making the complete overhaul of the safety assurance system, and started to look into the causes for the above incidents, also exploring the organizational backdrop to each.

As for the problems stemming from organizational defects, the report identified the following issues, among others: (1) the lack of awareness among staff about the importance of top-management directives, (2) a diminished sense of crisis about troubles, (3) weakened management attention about the parts-procurement business, (4) failure to construct a sufficient and appropriate system to deal with changes in the operational environment, including the systems for the Onagawa and Higashidori NPSs and the new inspection system, and the failure to apply sufficient resources to respond to those changes, (5) conducting business in a way that emphasizes doing things the "customary" way.

Tohoku Electric Power announced a total of 17 specific countermeasures to be taken, including the following: (1) clarification by the management in its policies that top priority will be placed on safety, (2) drastic reform of quality-related policies, (3) establishment of a nuclear power assessment division for the purpose of strengthening internal audits, (4) new creation of a nuclear power quality-assurance division, (5) clarification of the route by which information is transmitted, (6) review of the appropriate allocation of human resources, and (7) enhancement of meetings for the promotion of nuclear safety. The committee will continue to monitor the current status of those countermeasures as well as their effectiveness.

NISA had demanded that Tohoku Electric Power submit the report by August 7, but the deadline was postponed owing to the need to check a greater number of pipes for decreased thickness, among other reasons.

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