

AEC Decides on Basic Policies for FBRs through 2015

At its regular meeting on November 14, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) decided upon its basic policies in relation to R&D on FBR cycle technology for the coming decade. The policies were based upon a report recently prepared by the research planning and evaluation subcommittee's working committee on nuclear R&D (under MEXT's Science Council) and other factors.

The basic policies cover four basic pillars. First, the concerned parties will propose an R&D plan by 2015, in cooperation with the electric power utilities and manufacturers, covering all the stages from the conceptual design of a demonstration facility for the FBR cycle to its commercialization. Second, the relevant organizations will explore important technologies for realizing technological systems based on innovative concepts. Third, the requirements for a demonstration facility will be clarified through the discussion forums that already exist in various organizations, and the roles to be played by each party will also be spelled out. In addition, continual discussions will be made of measures to realize such a facility in the decade or so after that, as well as a road map for commercialization. Fourth, the operation of Monju will be resumed in FY2008 (starting April 1, 2008) so as to achieve its initial targets, including the establishment of technology within a decade or so to deal with sodium. The aim is to construct the demonstration facility by around 2025.

MEXT's report defines the main concept in the R&D for FBR commercialization as a combination of three technologies: (1) a sodium-cooled reactor (MOX fuel), (2) advanced aqueous reprocessing, and (3) simplified pellet fuel production. The AEC will begin discussions on a second reprocessing plant around 2010, and will reflect the results of the R&D in that.

The policy document identifies four activities to be carried out in support of the R&D on FBR commercialization: (1) securing the necessary funds on the premises of secured safety and nuclear nonproliferation, (2) organizing a so-called "knowledge foundation," (3) duly engaging in international cooperation, and (4) enhancing both the program of "listening widely to opinions" and PA activities.

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