

Company to Be Established to Develop FBR Demo Reactor

On December 27, four parties – the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC), and the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) – announced that they would select, through public invitation, a nucleus company by the end of the current fiscal year (i.e., by March 31, 2007) to develop a fast breeder reactor (FBR) demonstration reactor, in order to concentrate the development functions into a single company. JAEA is to establish a committee this month to work on the selection, and the parties will then ask the selected company to establish a new company for FBR development, funded in part by power utility companies.

That matter was decided upon at a conference held on December 27 to discuss a smooth shift to the FBR cycle demonstration process, and was also approved the same day by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) at an extraordinary meeting.

The FBR to be developed by the new company will be a sodium-cooled loop reactor (MOX fuel), the result of an investigation into and research on a strategy for commercializing the FBR cycle. In full-scale R&D for commercialization, which will get under way in the upcoming fiscal year (i.e., after April 1, 2007), the innovative technologies to be adopted will be decided upon by 2010, and a conceptual design for a demonstration reactor will be proposed by 2015. JAEA will provide the new company with the results of its R&D carried out up to now, and the new company will be responsible for the FBR development, up to stage of the proposal of the conceptual design (the start of the basic design). A total of 13 innovative technologies will be employed by the demonstration reactor, and the new company and JAEA will share the responsibility for developing them.

The new company will be staffed by several dozens employees, including several to be seconded from JAEA. An advisory committee will also be established as an external body to advise on the project, etc. It will consist of representatives of related organizations, specialists and experts in the field, and others.

Explaining the decision to entrust all the development activities, through to the stage of conceptual design, to one company, a spokesperson for the four parties said, "We want to break out of the 'convoy system' and carry out an efficient development program with the responsibilities clearly delineated." A system for developing the demonstration FBR will be taken up at the stage of commencing the basic design.

JAEA will take the lead in R&D on the fuel cycle, and on the secondary concept of a metal-fuel reactor core.

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