

METI Announces Estimated Nuclear-related Budget Requests

On August 24, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) released an outline of its estimated budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins on April 1, 2008. METI will seek a total of JPY198.9 billion (\$1.7 billion at \$1=115 yen), an increase of 12% from the budget for the current fiscal year, primarily for the development pillars of technology for next-generation light water reactors (LWRs) and the fast breeder reactor (FBR) cycle, seismic safety and disaster prevention measures, and measures for dealing with radioactive waste.

The nuclear-related budgets for the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE) can be broken down into 25.6 billion yen (\$222 million), up 70% from the current year, for promoting technological development toward advanced uses of nuclear energy; 6.7 billion yen (\$58 million), up 22%, for boosting measures to deal with radwaste; and 138.1 billion yen (\$1.2 billion), up 7%, for realizing coexistence and co-prosperity between nuclear facilities and local communities, focusing on various grants and subsidies. Budgets related to the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) come to 34.1 billion yen (\$297 million), up 4%.

In the promotion of technological development, a sum of 1.5 billion yen (\$13 million) will be newly earmarked for full-scale research on a next-generation LWR for which feasibility studies were conducted in the previous and current fiscal years. For the development of an FBR demonstration reactor jointly with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), ANRE will request 6.5 billion yen (\$57 million), nearly double this year's amount, and continue its efforts in developing technologies related to various aspects of nuclear fuel cycle. METI will also request 4 billion yen (\$35 million), almost four times the current level, to support uranium prospecting overseas, as well as to increase assistance for human resource development at universities, etc., and in Asian and other countries that are considering introducing nuclear power.

Regarding measures for dealing with radioactive waste, METI will request budgets for new projects, including establishment of a virtual disposal site so as to help people understand the reality of ultra-long-term safety – that in preparation for development of a demonstration facility where people can even better understand safety via a real-world experience.

In the wake of the Niigata-Chuetsu Offshore Earthquake, NISA will allocate 12.1 billion yen (\$105 million), up 50%, for earlier implementation of evaluations and confirmations of seismic safety, reinforcing methods of evaluation and confirmation, etc. It will also ask for 1.8 billion yen (\$16 million), 2.5 times the current level, for strengthening the technological foundation and enhancing studies on the soundness of fuels and materials for LWRs using domestic material test reactors, and 1.8 billion yen (\$16 million), up 36%, for studies on radwaste disposal.

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