

Opposition to the Reactivation of Kyushu Electric's Sendai Nuclear Power Plant

On March 13, The Nuclear Regulatory Commission decided that it would prioritize an investigation of the Sendai Power Plant's 1 & 2 reactors in Kagoshima Prefecture. The Commission will examine whether the reactors have met the new regulation standards. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated that, "Nuclear power plants deemed to have met regulation standards will be reactivated". Mr. Abe's policy is to allow the reactivation of nuclear plants, and it has been reported that this could be as early as this summer.

However, despite claims by the chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Shunichi Tanaka that the new regulation standards are "the strictest in the world", this is not the case. Important installations included in the European Pressurised Reactors Safety Protocol such as the core catcher, which stores and cools nuclear core material in the case of a melt down, and the construction of a reactor container that can withstand aircraft attacks, are not included in the new regulation standards.

What is more, the new regulation standards place emphasis on measures against tsunami and severe calamities, but do not take into consideration the needed improvements to earthquake resistance. Furthermore, many specialists point out that the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant must consider the risk of volcanic eruptions. A Kagoshima University professor specializing in volcanic geology, Ryusuke Imura, has reported that the several large calderas dotted around the Sendai plant are remains of a massive volcanic eruption. He further reported that during the volcanic eruption of the Aira caldera situated in the north of Kagoshima bay which took place 30,000 years ago, the resulting pyroclastic flow reached as far as the Sendai Power Plant's present location. Moreover, in a survey carried out by the Mainichi Newspaper among volcanologists about the danger of volcanic activity surrounding the 17 nuclear power plants in the country, 29 out of the 50 volcanologists surveyed named the Sendai plant as the plant most in danger of a massive volcanic eruption.

In view of these multiple problems, on March 18, the Governor of Kumamoto prefecture, Ikuo Kabashima, stated in reference to the reactivation of the nuclear plant during a press release that "this is not only a problem for Kagoshima and Saga prefectures (where the power plant is situated). Citizens throughout Kyushu are concerned about safety. Safety should be guaranteed as a responsibility of the state, therefore the state has the responsibility to provide a detailed explanation." As Governor Kabashima indicated, this issue has a huge effect on neighboring local authorities and residents, too. For example, Minamata city in Kumamoto is designated as the recipient of evacuees from Izumi city, Kagoshima.

If the government decides to reactivate the nuclear plant without careful verification of the risks of volcanic eruptions as pointed out by specialists, without a thorough briefing to local authorities in Kumamoto and other regions of Kyushu and without these local authorities consent, this will prove that better management of the electrical company is of more importance than residents' lives. Therefore, we hereby express our firm opposition to such action.

26 April 2014
Mayors for Nuclear Power Free Japan