

For Enhancing Approaches to the Implementation of Geological Disposal of High-Level Radioactive Waste

12 June 2007

Atomic Energy Commission

The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) has recently been informed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) that now that the Law to Amend the Specified Radioactive Waste Final Disposal Act, etc. has been approved, the METI will discuss the following issues while considering expert opinions thereon: (i) the establishment of legal framework for dealing with radioactive waste containing transuranium elements subject to geological disposal, a task identified as appropriate to consider further in the Framework for Nuclear Energy Policy, as well as radioactive waste to be returned from overseas; and (ii) the enhancement of efforts to select construction sites for high-level radioactive waste disposal facilities.

The AEC considers that in the course of discussing the latter issue, the METI should refer to the points that the AEC requested due consideration of in its 13 March 2007 statements, and should also take note of the following points:

(1) Increasing Public Learning Opportunities on the Safety of Geological Disposal

There is serious shortage of opportunities for the public to acquire information on the safety of geological disposal, such as information on the current status of safe storage of vitrified high-level radioactive waste in Japan, which is to be disposed in geological repository, as well as the results of the R&D projects related to technologies for safe disposal and the safety assessments thereof carried out by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan (NUMO) in collaboration with European and US agencies specializing in this field. The government, the NUMO and the JAEA should, with a clear awareness of the fact that the most important stakeholder as to such R&D achievements is the general public, take decisive measures to drastically increase opportunities for the public to learn about the safety of geological disposal.

(2) Promoting Mutual Understanding within and beyond Municipal Boundaries

In cases where a municipality intends to apply for investigation aimed at selection as a disposal site, it is important to foster understanding of geological disposal of high-level radioactive waste not only among many of the inhabitants of the applicant municipality but also among those of the prefecture where the applicant municipality

lies. To this end, it is undoubtedly important that learning sessions should be held wherein residents and those who play active roles in support of industry in the applicant municipality can actively participate. It is also important that such activities are widely promoted beyond the municipal boundary. In this direction, the government and the municipalities are required to prepare an environment where such activities can be executed. Also the NUMO and electric utilities are required to widely provide information that is reliable and useful for such activities, taking into consideration the importance of the making such activities widespread beyond the boundary of the municipality. Thus, efforts should be made to effectively promote a mutual understanding of geological disposal among the resident, the NUMO and the Government through cooperation with the local communities involved.

(3) Ensuring Compatibility between Disposal Projects and the Development of Host Communities

The construction of disposal facilities is beneficial to the general public. From the viewpoint of ensuring equity of benefits, the government, as the representative of the general public, should support the development of the local community that accepts the facilities. In this respect, the METI, the NUMO and electric utilities companies should discuss various development models for host communities based on the comments from the people in various parts of the nation, and publicize such models as examples. Through such measures, they should also consider highlighting that the general public takes an interest in the development of the host communities and the parties concerned have every intention of participating in the community development activities as partners.

(4) Improving the Functions of the NUMO

The NUMO was established as an organization responsible for implementing geological disposal of high-level radioactive waste in a safe and secure manner over the long term. The government should assess whether the NUMO has demonstrated to society sufficient reliability in fulfilling this responsibility and has fostered the necessary capabilities for conducting technological development, preparing strategies for selecting disposal sites, and providing the necessary information and explanations. Based on the result of the assessment, the Government should provide the NUMO with appropriate guidance and supervision, including the request for further amelioration of its functions in accordance with the basic policy for final disposal of specified radioactive waste.