

On Ensuring Transparency and the Public's Confidence in the Safety Assurance of Nuclear Energy

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Atomic Energy Commission

Recently, a series of announcements have been made by electric utilities about the cover-up of falsification of data and incidents that should have been reported to the authorities, following the investigations ordered by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry into past activities aimed at uncovering problems such cover-ups. On 15 March, Hokuriku Electric Power Co. announced that it had concealed an unplanned criticality incident in June 1999 at unit 1 of Shika nuclear power plant during the periodic inspection.

Such a cover-up represents a refusal to engage with the system of world nuclear operators' traditional efforts to enrich knowledge basis for the assurance of nuclear safety based on the lessons learned from mistakes and incidents. Moreover, the fact that the cover-up had not been revealed until now may result in shaking public confidence in the safety assurance systems of nuclear power plants. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) takes this matter seriously inasmuch as it believes, as given in the Framework for Nuclear Energy Policy, that incessantly improving safety assurance systems through learning from the experiences in Japan and abroad and ensuring the transparency of these systems and related activities to the public are vital for the promotion of the development and utilization of nuclear power generation.

The AEC believes that in order to nurture the public confidence in electric utilities' safety assurance systems and related activities, their top management must, in the first place, disseminate throughout their organizations its management policies that place top priority on safety and compliance with laws and regulations and allocate necessary and sufficient resources and attention to all activities in accordance with their degree of importance to safety. Secondly, electric utilities must facilitate the functioning of the quality management systems for activities to assure safety, which could assure the quality of the activities at a high level by planning and implementing the activities, reviewing their performance and taking actions to continually improving their performance. As a part thereof, when mistakes and abnormal incidents occur, it is necessary to analyze their root causes and take corrective measures based on the analysis and share the findings thereof with concerned parties worldwide. Thirdly, the electric utilities need to steadily make these efforts to ensure safety while fulfilling the responsibility for accountability to the general public and local communities as well as promoting activities to deepen mutual understanding.

The AEC expects that as the smooth development and utilization of nuclear power generation is important for the future of our society, electric utilities will strictly verify whether there are any blind spots in their efforts with regard to the above-mentioned measures and ensure their consistent execution. The AEC believes at the same time that it is important for the Government to make an independent review to confirm whether the current safety assurance system deserves public confidence based on assessments of the root-causes of past inappropriate acts that will be made public by electric utilities.

The AEC intends to keep monitoring efforts by the parties concerned with regard to these matters and to continue expressing its views as necessary, based on the Framework for Nuclear Energy Policy.