

Japan Nuclear Plants, natural disasters: government and the plant's operator opposed boosting prevention

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Fukushima

Industry body opposed boosting nuke disaster prevention steps before Fukushima crisis

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) had told the government's Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) in writing that it would oppose any plans to step up preventative measures against nuclear accidents shortly before the outbreak on March 11, 2011, of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, according to documents obtained by the Mainichi through information disclosure laws.

The FEPC, which groups 10 power companies in the country, said in written documents addressed to the NSC that it would stand against the government body's move to strengthen the country's preventative measures against nuclear accidents because such plans would give the impression that nuclear power was dangerous and affect the regions hosting nuclear power plants accordingly, as well as push up costs for such measures. The revelation shows that the utility firms in the country downplayed preventative measures against nuclear accidents.

The NSC, tasked with drawing up the country's guidelines on nuclear disaster prevention, started its preparations to introduce new guidelines in March 2006 after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) defined international standards for preventative measures against major nuclear accidents in 2002. However, the NSC had shelved its plan for tougher preventative measures once because the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) repeatedly opposed the move, saying, "It would amplify public fears about nuclear power."

But many foreign countries started to introduce preventative measures against nuclear accidents, and therefore the NSC expressed its intention to consider introducing tougher preventative measures again in its "basic plans for near-term measures" released in December 2010.

Responding to the NSC's move, the FEPC sent the written documents to the NSC on Jan. 13 and

Feb. 3, 2011, saying that it had “estimated in its own right” the possible reaction from local governments in the event that the international standards were adopted.

On the impact of the introduction of a Precautionary Action Zone (PAZ) designated within a radius of about five kilometers from a troubled nuclear power plant, the FEPC said, “It could cause land prices to fall and reduce the number of tourists.” It also opposed the idea of expanding Emergency Planning Zones (EPZ) within a radius of eight to 10 kilometers from a troubled nuclear power plant to designate an Urgent Protective Action Planning Zone (UPZ) within a radius of about 30 kilometers from the nuclear plant, saying, “Local governments that fall within the zone will demand subsidies.”

Shortly after that, the crisis broke out at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The NSC worked out new guidelines based on international standards on March 22 this year. The government set aside 8.97 billion yen for “subsidies for emergency safety measures” in the state budget for fiscal 2012, three times more than the outlay for the previous year. The NSC said, “Before the accident, the plant operators that were supposed to be regulated were allowed to intervene in policy decision-making.”

The FEPC, on the other hand, said, “It was part of our cooperation in introducing standards.”

It had already been found out that NISA also opposed the introduction of tougher disaster prevention measures in 2006.

Mainichi Shimbun, March 26, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/27/20120327p2a00m0na015000c.html>

TEPCO was warned of possible power loss from tsunami at nuclear plants in 2006

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) warned the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) in 2006 of the possibility of losing all power at nuclear power plants in the event of a tsunami, but this warning was ignored, it has been learned.

The warning came after the 2004 earthquake off of Sumatra and ensuing tsunami, but NISA did not press power companies to put in place tsunami countermeasures. A NISA official says, “If measures had been taken then, the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster might have been prevented.”

The issuance of the warning was revealed by Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano at a press conference on May 15 after a Cabinet meeting.

NISA had been holding information sessions since January 2006 along with the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, TEPCO and other utilities. Because the tsunami from the Sumatra quake had forced a reactor-cooling seawater pump at a nuclear plant in India to go offline, effects and countermeasures for Japan’s nuclear plants were discussed at the sessions. In August 2006, it was pointed out that a tsunami larger than expected could cause the seawater pump at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to go offline.

However, on May 14 at a meeting of a Diet committee investigating the Fukushima disaster, TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata said, “The warning was not transmitted to me, and the executives

did not consider countermeasures.”

Mainichi Shimbun, May 15, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120515p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Fukui

Warnings over fault below nuke reactors in Fukui were ignored

The possibility that a fault right below the nuclear reactor buildings at the Tsuruga Power Station in Fukui Prefecture may move in conjunction with nearby active faults has been repeatedly pointed out since 2008, but the government regulator and the plant’s operator failed until recently to take any measures.

The Japan Atomic Power Co. (JAPC), the operator of the Tsuruga nuclear power plant, only released its plan on May 14 this year to survey the area to examine the possibility that the fracture zones — a type of fault — right below the plant’s nuclear reactor buildings could in fact be active faults. The planned survey — scheduled to be completed by November — was approved by the government’s Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) later the same day.

If the fracture zones are recognized as active faults that had moved sometime after around 120,000 to 130,000 years ago, the Tsuruga nuclear plant is likely to be decommissioned. It has been confirmed that there are 150 to 160 fracture zones on the premises of the plant in Tsuruga. On April 24, NISA surveyed three fracture zones, including two running below the building housing the plant’s No. 2 reactor, raising the possibility that they could move in tandem with an active fault called the Urasoko Fault, located some 150 meters northeast of the No. 2 reactor.

On May 14, NISA held a meeting of experts to discuss the issue and approved JAPC’s plan to report the survey results by November. While JAPC is poised to underscore its claim that the fracture zones are “not active faults” by conducting boring surveys at five locations at the nuclear plant, the plant cannot be reactivated unless the operator can provide evidence supporting these assertions.

Yuichi Sugiyama, the head of a research team at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), which surveyed fault lines at the Tsuruga nuclear plant, said at the NISA meeting on May 14, “The possibility that the fracture zones are active faults cannot be ruled out at the moment. We should obtain reliable survey results, even if it takes time.”

The presence of the fracture zones below the Tsuruga nuclear plant was mentioned in the application for permission to construct the No. 1 reactor, which was approved in 1966. However, it was determined at the time that the fracture zones were small-scale “dead faults” from extremely old times, and they were not taken into consideration for the plant’s seismic-resistant design. The presence of the Urasoko active fault — located some 250 meters away from the No. 1 reactor — had not been known by that time.

It was in 1991 that the presence of the Urasoko Fault came to surface. While it had initially been thought that the fault was about 3 kilometers long, several faults were later discovered to exist along its extension. Experts pointed out the risk of the faults moving together, but JAPC only

acknowledged in March 2008 that they were active faults about 25 kilometers long.

Several experts had also earlier pointed out the possibility that the fracture zones at the Tsuruga nuclear complex could move in conjunction with the Urasoko Fault and could have a critical impact on the nuclear reactors. However, JAPC submitted a report to NISA in 2008, insisting that the fracture zones' activity period dates back to earlier times and that they would not move in tandem with the Urasoko Fault.

Mitsuhisa Watanabe, professor at Toyo University and a specialist in active faults, was skeptical about the JAPC report at the time. "Old fracture zones are consolidated and become stiff, but the report does not use such expressions as 'stiff' at all." The distribution of the fracture zones at the Tsuruga plant also convinced him that they were apparently linked to the Urasoko Fault. Watanabe has thus repeatedly pointed out the possibility of the faults moving together during academic meetings and other occasions since 2008.

However, JAPC and NISA failed to take immediate action. Even after an opinion was voiced demanding an in-depth examination of the issue during a council meeting at NISA in September 2010, the agency did not conduct an on-the-spot survey at the Tsuruga power station. It was only after the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March last year that NISA finally moved ahead to conduct a field survey at the Tsuruga plant, in April this year.

During the survey, the fracture zones at the Tsuruga plant were found to be soft when scraped with sickles and extend linearly on the land surface. All four experts who took part in the survey agreed that the fracture zones "cannot be determined to be old faults." Masaru Kobayashi, director at NISA's seismic safety office, said remorsefully, "I should've ordered a survey much earlier."

Says professor Watanabe, "Why did they fail to conduct the survey for such a long time on something that can be so easily understood by visiting the spot? It's not academic research but an argument for safety. The plant should be decommissioned right away."

Mainichi Shimbun, May 15, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120515p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Nuclear industry group paid 7.9 million yen to 4 scholars on Fukui panel

FUKUI — An Osaka-based nuclear power industry group with strong ties to Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) paid four members of a 12-member Fukui prefectural nuclear safety advisory panel a total of 7.9 million yen in contributions between fiscal 2006 and 2010, the Mainichi has learned.

The Fukui prefectural panel is tasked with giving Fukui Prefecture, home to over a dozen nuclear reactors, technical advice, including guidance related to decisions on the restart of idled KEPCO nuclear power plants.

According to the Osaka-based Kansai nuclear power council (Kan Gen Kon), it gave the money to the four in the form of research grants. They are Fukui University professor Yoshinobu Izumi, who received 300,000 yen in fiscal 2010, Osaka University professor Kazutoshi Nishimoto, who received 3.6 million yen between fiscal 2006 and 2008, former Kyoto University professor Kaichiro Mishima who received 3 million yen between 2006 and 2007 and Nagoya University professor Akio Yamamoto, who received 1 million yen between fiscal 2009 and 2010.

A KEPCO board member normally chairs the Kan Gen Kon and KEPCO serves as a corporate member. The Kan Gen Kon says it is giving research grants to scholars who have made contributions to the promotion of nuclear power and the use of radiation and are conducting promising research. It added it is operating independently of KEPCO.

The Fukui prefectural panel stipulates only that the governor will request experts to be on the panel without requiring them to report on contributions from the nuclear power industry and other details.

The governmental Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan asks prospective members of the commission to voluntarily report their relations with the electric power industry and other details to ensure neutrality in their screenings of nuclear issues.

Mainichi Shimbun, March 26, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/26/20120326p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Osaka, Tokyo

Researchers warn of destructive power of triple Nankai tremors on Osaka, Tokyo

CHIBA — If three earthquakes simultaneously occurred along the Nankai Trough located in the seabed off central to western Japan, high-rise buildings in Osaka would be shaken by long-period ground motion five times stronger than that in the Great East Japan Earthquake, researchers have predicted.

A group of researchers with the University of Tokyo made the announcement on May 21 at the Japan Geoscience Union Meeting, currently under way in Chiba. The group also speculates that, if the three temblors — the Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai quakes — took place together, high-rise buildings in Tokyo would be shaken by long-period ground motion twice to three times stronger than that in the Great East Japan Earthquake, which struck northeast Japan on March 11, 2011.

The long-period ground motion will be stronger in the Tokai-Tonankai-Nankai earthquake because seismic tremors will be amplified by soft rock and stone deposited along the plate boundaries in the Nankai Trough, according to the researchers. The announcement is expected to prompt authorities to step up measures to minimize possible effects on urban areas, which host skyscrapers.

In their study, the group predicted the intensity of long-period ground motion in the event that magnitude-8.7 triple earthquakes took place along the Nankai Trough simultaneously. In case of seismic movements with a cycle of six seconds, the seismic velocity would be 250 centimeters per second in Osaka's bay area — five times that in the Great East Japan Earthquake — and 110 to 165 centimeters per second in central Tokyo. The tremors in both cities would also last at least twice as long as the March 11 quake, according to the researchers.

In the Great East Japan Earthquake, long-period ground motion shook high-rise buildings in the heart of Tokyo but did not cause as much damage considering the scale of the earthquake. The researchers speculate that this was because there is little deposited material along the Japan trench off the Tohoku region, which was why long-period ground motion was not amplified in the March 11,

2011 quake. In the possible triple earthquakes along the Nankai Trough, however, soft rock and stone accumulated several kilometers thick along plate boundaries would amplify long-period ground motion, the researchers surmise.

Because Osaka is close to the expected hypocenter of the triple quakes and the seismic movements are expected to be amplified in the trough, researchers predicted that the impact of the triple temblors would be great. Even in Tokyo, which is relatively far from the potential hypocenter, the seismic movements that were amplified and transmitted along the Nankai Trough would be intensified as they reach the mortar-shaped Kanto Plains, according to the researchers.

Takashi Furumura, a professor specialized in seismology at the University of Tokyo, said, "It is not known how much damage the three earthquakes along the Nankai Trough would cause, but measures should be immediately taken in urban areas with skyscrapers."

Mainichi Shimbun, May 22, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120522p2a00m0na025000c.html>

Projected Tokyo quake to hit top intensity over wider area; science ministry

A powerful inland earthquake expected to occur in the Tokyo metropolitan area is likely to register 7 on the 7-point Japanese intensity scale over the largest area if it hits near the Tokyo-Chiba border, according to a science ministry research team estimate.

The team of experts set up by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry announced the estimate on March 30.

The estimate has prompted the national government to review its damage projections for such a massive disaster, as well as its disaster-prevention measures, and will pressure local bodies in the region to reconsider their quake preparedness.

Team member and University of Tokyo professor Kazuki Koketsu urges all areas in the region to be prepared for a powerful quake, regardless of the estimate.

"The estimate was made based on various assumed conditions, so the distribution of the intensity scales will shift a great deal if those conditions are changed," he says. "Not only areas where strong vibrations are expected but also all areas in southern Kanto should be prepared for a powerful quake."

The team, comprised mainly of University of Tokyo's Earthquake Research Institute researchers, surveyed the subsurface structure of the metropolitan area using seismometers at 296 locations in Tokyo and its vicinity.

The survey has confirmed that the plate that is expected to cause a powerful inland earthquake in the region is five to 10 kilometers shallower than assumed by the government's Central Disaster Management Council.

Based on the finding, the research team set an assumed epicentral area of about 63 kilometers east to west and some 31 kilometers north to south.

It then estimated the vibration intensity of a magnitude-7.3 inland earthquake on the assumption that the epicenter would be in a coastal area near the border of Tokyo and Chiba Prefecture, around the city of Chiba or in western downtown Tokyo.

The team estimates that if the epicenter is near the Tokyo-Chiba border, the quake will register 7 on the Japanese intensity scale in the most extensive areas, including the Edogawa, Koto, Shinagawa and Ota wards of Tokyo as well as the Kanagawa Prefecture city of Kawasaki, among other areas. Moreover, such a temblor is assumed to measure an upper-6 in Yokohama and the eastern Tama region of Tokyo, even though it had been previously estimated at a lower-6 in these regions.

If its epicenter is around the city of Chiba, the team predicts that it will register 7 near the mouth of the Sumida River. If its epicenter is situated in a western Tokyo ward, it is presumed to measure 7 in Kawasaki and other areas as well as near the mouth of the Sumida River.

Furthermore, the team predicts that such an earthquake will measure at least an upper-6 in most of the 23 wards in central Tokyo, regardless of where the epicenter is located. It had previously been believed that it would register not more than a lower-6 in western Tokyo wards.

Mainichi Shimbun, March 31, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120331p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Shiga

Fault near Shiga nuclear power plant likely active: survey

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A fault located near Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shiga nuclear plant is likely to be active and may require the utility to review the plant's quake-resistance standard, a survey found Thursday.

The survey by Toyo University professor Mitsuhiro Watanabe and Nagoya University professor Yasuhiro Suzuki has found that the fault 9 kilometers north of the plant in Ishikawa Prefecture had moved in the last 120,000 to 130,000 years, a timeframe the government advises nuclear power plant operators to review for fault movements.

If the fault moves, it may cause a stronger than anticipated earthquake to strike the area around the power plant and needs to be closely examined, they said.

The professors believe that terraces at different heights formed on once flat land around the fault in the coastal area are evidence of repeated fault movements.

Traces of abrupt land elevation also found in the coast near the plant are "evidence of fault activities which have been continuing for several thousands of years," Watanabe said.

The fault has been known since the 1970s, but it has never been clearly recognized as an active one.

Hokuriku Electric officials said the fault is not active and should not affect the safety of the Shiga complex. The two reactors at the plant have been offline since being halted last year for regular maintenance.

Kyodo Press, May 04, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120504p2g00m0dm017000c.html>

Niigata

TEPCO to recalculate potential tsunami height near Niigata nuke plant

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) announced April 26 that it will recalculate the height of a potential tsunami that may strike its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture.

The move was pushed forward after four prefectures located along the Sea of Japan released their own estimates, which state that the scale of a potential earthquake in the area where the nuclear plant is located is in fact up to around 2.8 times stronger than what TEPCO has estimated.

Based on current TEPCO estimations, a magnitude 7.85 quake may occur at a fault extending some 131 kilometers near Niigata Prefecture's Sado Island, which could trigger a 3.3-meter-high tsunami. Based on these estimations, the company is currently proceeding with the construction of an embankment that would resist waves of up to some 15 meters in height.

However, based on a report issued by the Tottori Prefectural Government, there is a risk that a fault running for 220 kilometers located within the same area may trigger an 8.15 magnitude earthquake. Separate reports released by the Shimane and Ishikawa prefectural governments point to a risk of magnitude 8.01 and magnitude 7.99 earthquakes in the area, respectively.

Judging the reports to be of "valuable information that must be reflected in safety assessments," TEPCO submitted a report on those estimates to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

Results of the recalculation may affect future safety assessments, including stress tests, at the plant.

Mainichi Shimbun, April 27, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120427p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Japan Atomic Power overlooks data on fault beneath plant for 7 yrs

Kyodo Press, March 22, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/22/20120322p2g00m0dm011000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan Atomic Power Co. has overlooked for seven years data from its sonic survey of 2005 finding that a fault running under its Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture could trigger an earthquake more serious than anticipated, a government-affiliated researcher suggested Wednesday.

The importance of the data was confirmed through recent reexamination of them by a team of

researchers at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology.

Earlier in March, Yuichi Sugiyama, leader of the team, said the Urazoko fault under the plant is at least 35 kilometers long and could trigger a quake with a magnitude of around 7.4, more than twice as much energy as earlier expected to be contained in a quake.

The research team estimated the length of the Urazoko fault by combining other faults connected to it, and the magnitude in expectation that the fault will cause a total displacement of more than 3 meters if it becomes active.

The government's Earthquake Research Committee and Japan Atomic Power earlier estimated that the Urazoko fault, including other faults connected to it, is 25 km long.

Japan Atomic Energy has failed to provide the data for studies at an expert panel launched in 2008 by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Ikata

Nuclear agency to approve Ikata reactor's initial stress test soon

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency decided Monday to sign off on the results of an initial stress test on an idled nuclear reactor at the Ikata power plant in the near future, a move that would make it the third reactor to have cleared a key step for resuming operation.

The agency said in a revised draft report that it has confirmed through the test that the plant operator Shikoku Electric Power Co. has taken sufficient measures to prevent the reactor from getting into a situation similar to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, even if it is hit by an earthquake and tsunami like the one that occurred in Japan's northeast a year ago.

Once the agency finalizes the report, the Nuclear Safety Commission, the five-member state body tasked with supervising the government's nuclear safety regulations, will check the adequacy of the agency's evaluation on the stress test on the No. 3 unit of the Ikata reactor in Ehime Prefecture, western Japan.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and three ministers concerned are then to judge whether to authorize the restart of the reactor.

The government mandated the two-stage stress test following the accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi plant. Clearing the first stage of the computer simulation-based test is a precondition for reopening reactors that have been idled for scheduled checkups.

The two reactors that have already won the agency's approval on their stress test results are the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Kyodo Press, March 20, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/20/20120320p2g00m0dm017000c.html>

Agency reports validity of Ikata reactors stress test to commission

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency said Monday it has endorsed stress test results on an idled reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata power plant, make it the third reactor to have cleared a key step for resuming operation.

The government's nuclear safety agency said it submitted a report validating the test results on the No. 3 unit of the plant in Ehime Prefecture to the Nuclear Safety Commission to have the adequacy of the agency's evaluation checked.

But the prospects for subsequent procedures are uncertain as the commission's chairman, Haruki Madarame, has said it would be difficult for the body to check the stress test results because the commission is planned to be incorporated with a new nuclear regulatory agency soon.

The new agency was originally scheduled to be set up April 1, but given a delay in Diet deliberations in a related bill on its establishment, the agency is unlikely to be set up as planned and the commission is expected to remain in existence for a while.

The nuclear safety agency said in the report it has confirmed through the test that Shikoku Electric has taken sufficient measures to prevent the Ikata reactor from getting into a situation similar to that at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, even if it is hit by an earthquake and tsunami bigger than assumed levels when the reactor was designed, like the one that occurred in Japan's northeast a year ago.

The government mandated the two-stage stress test following the crisis at the Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima complex. Clearing the first stage of the computer simulation-based test is a precondition for restarting reactors that have been idled for regular checkups.

The two reactors that have already won the agency's approval of their stress test results are the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Kyodo Press, March 26, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/26/20120326p2g00m0dm123000c.html>

Stress tests

New nuclear safety standards criticized as ad-hoc measures

An outline of the government's new safety standards for resuming idled nuclear reactors has simply listed measures the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) has drawn up in response to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The outline also suggests that operators of nuclear power plants express readiness to independently

implement measures, reflecting the government's veiled objective of restarting idled reactors at an early date.

NISA at the end of March mapped out a 30-point nuclear safety policy which features short-term steps, such as installing vehicle-mounted electricity generators on high ground, and mid-term and long-term measures, like developing multiplexed external power sources.

A proposed nuclear regulatory agency was poised to succeed these safety measures from NISA and write a bill, but stalled Diet deliberations are making it difficult to predict when the planned agency will be established.

The outline calls for power-source facilities inside nuclear power plants, but it remains unclear what kind of facilities power plant operators should prepare and to what extent they should improve their facilities to boost safety. It simply says nuclear power plant operators should find appropriate measures to ensure safety of nuclear power plants.

Baku Nishio, co-director of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, criticizes the government's new safety standards, saying they are just ad-hoc measures in reaction to the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Mainichi Shimbun, April 6, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120406p2a00m0na010000c.html>

84 percent say government stress tests for nuclear plant restarts inadequate: survey

Despite the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) of Japan's conclusion that the idled Oi Nuclear Power Plant clears safety standards required for resuming operations, 84 percent of the public do not believe that the government's safety tests are sufficient, a Mainichi opinion poll has found.

The Mainichi survey was conducted on March 31 and April 1 via phone, using phone numbers that were chosen randomly by computer. Phone numbers in municipalities that have been deemed no-go zones due to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant were excluded. The response rate was 60 percent, with 905 people responding from 1,499 households with qualified voters.

Of the 905 respondents, 62 percent said they were against resuming operations of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO)'s Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, far outnumbering the 33 percent who said they supported the reactors' restart. Meanwhile, only 10 percent considered the NSC's so-called stress tests to be sufficient, while 84 percent said that they were not.

Discussions over a bill that would allow the launch of a new nuclear regulatory agency have stalled in the Diet, postponing its April 1 inauguration date. Because of this, oversight of nuclear power will remain under the jurisdiction of existing government bodies for the time being, even though the public carries a great distrust toward how government bodies have handled the disaster thus far. Even among survey respondents who said that they agreed with the restart of the two Oi reactors, 67 percent said the government's stress tests were insufficient.

The public's views for and against the restart of the Oi plant vary by region, with those opposing it comprising 75 percent of respondents in Hokkaido; 63 percent in the Kinki region, where the plant is

located; and 54 percent in the Koshientsu and Hokuriku regions. Meanwhile, 31 percent of those who support the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) said they are for the restart, while 61 percent said they are against it. Among Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) supporters the split was even, with 47 percent supporting the restart, and 48 percent against it.

On March 23, the NSC ruled that the initial stress test results of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Oi plant — whose operations have been halted for regular inspections — were satisfactory, thereby passing the prerequisite for resuming plant operations. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and the three ministers involved are expected to hold discussions and confirm the reactors' safety, after which they will move into talks with local host communities. The government will make a final decision about the restart after obtaining the communities' consent. The Fukui Prefectural Government and other local governments, however, have shown resistance to the reactors' restart.

Mainichi Shimbun, April 2, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120402p2a00m0na010000c.html>
