Réseau
Sortir du nucléaire

Réseau "Sortir du nucléaire"
9 rue Dumenge - 69317 Lyon
Tél : 04 78 28 29 22 Fax : 04 72 07 70 04
www.sortirdunucleaire.org

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Steel in Troubled French Nuclear Reactor Used in Japanese Plants

Stephen Stapczynski Emi Urabe

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Thirteen Japanese nuclear reactors were constructed with steel from the same company used in a French power plant that's under scrutiny for anomalies found in the reactor vessel's structure.

Six utilities used steel from Japan Casting & Forging Corp., they all said in separate statements on Friday. The steelmaker was identified by Japanese authorities last month as supplying steel to the Flamanville nuclear plant, developed by Electricite de France SA and Areva SA, where the French safety authority last year found weaker-than-expected steel.

Japan's nuclear regulators asked utilities last month to examine reactor parts manufactured by the same companies as the Flamanville facility. Utilities must now evaluate whether their reactor pressure vessels meet Japan's standards and report the results to the Nuclear Regulation Authority by Oct. 31.

The Japanese facilities affected include Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai No. 1 and 2 reactors, the company said Friday. The plant was restarted last year and is facing opposition from the region's new governor, who has demanded they be temporarily shut for inspections.

Reactors that are currently operating don't need to be shut down, Yoko Kobayashi, an official with the NRA's planning division, said Friday. The affected utilities are now required to submit manufacturing reports and past evaluation results, she said.

Nuclear Challenge

The steel scrutiny is latest hurdle for nuclear power in Japan and the government's goal of having it account for as much as 22 percent of its energy mix by 2030 in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Local court challenges have threatened reactor operations, and even those restarted under new post-Fukushima safety rules have faced a rocky road. Only three of the nation's 42 operable reactors are online.

Parts manufactured by JCFC met rigorous standards requested by the utilities, and the company will provide support going forward, Seigo Otsubo, an official at the company, said Friday.

EDF and Areva are conducting additional tests to determine whether the anomalies are a safety issue. The two companies said in April that the submission of their report to French regulators about the Flamanville reactor has been delayed until year-end.

EDF has also determined that steam generator channel heads at 18 French reactors contain anomalies similar to those at Flamanville, Autorite de Surete Nucleaire, the safety regulator, said in June.

Japanese reactors that used steel from JCFC, according to statements from the companies :

- Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.'s Fukushima Dai-2 No. 2, No. 4
- Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama No. 2, Oi No. 1 and No. 2
- Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, Sendai No. 1, No. 2
- Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata No. 2
- Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika No. 1
- Japan Atomic Energy Agency's Tsuruga No. 2