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EDF Says Flamanville Timeline Little Changed

After a series of setbacks and budget overruns, French utility EDF said Thursday that the Flamanville Unit 3 construction project, cleared provisionally by regulators in late June regarding pressure vessel steel integrity, would remain roughly on schedule, naming May 2019 as the first date for grid connection and November of the same year as the date for the unit to reach 100 percent power output.

EDF said the fuel would be loaded into the European Pressurized Reactor in late 2018 and that it would begin cold and hot production testing in May 2019.

According to the World Nuclear Association, previous estimates for budget and start-up for the 1630 MWe reactor have both been surpassed. In the previous estimate, released in 2015, however, fuel loading for the unit was expected to occur in the final quarter of 2018.

Construction on the unit began a decade ago with a completed cost expected to be \$(3.3 euros)billion. That budget has now reached more than three times that amount, a September 2015 estimate set at \$(10.5 euros) billion.

It was feared the latest setback could derail the project completely. In April 2015, component manufacturer Areva NP announced that higher-than-expected carbon anomalies in the various locations in the steel used for the reactor pressure vessel's top head and bottom head had been discovered. The findings led to investigations into the integrity of Areva components delivered to projects in France, Finland and China.

On June 28, French regulator, the Nuclear Safety Authority, allowed a provisional start to the Flamanville reactor, ruling that it could be put into operations, but the reactor vessel heads would need to be replaced by 2025. EDF, in response, said that a strident maintenance schedule could counter the need for replacement that quickly.

“EDF has taken note of the ASN’s position indicating that the Flamanville 3 reactor vessel is fit for service. Construction at the site is progressing according to the schedule announced in September 2015 : the system performance tests have started, with a view to the fuel loading and the reactor start-up, scheduled for the end of 2018,” the utility said.

“Regarding the vessel bottom, EDF has developed an in-service monitoring system that will ensure its operation over the long term. With regard to the vessel cap, EDF takes note of the ASN’s request to plan for its replacement by the end of 2024. The direct cost of replacing a vessel cap amounts to approximately €100 million. At the same time, EDF’s teams are mobilized to develop an in-service monitoring method that would allow it to demonstrate that the lid maintains its qualities over the long term. EDF is committed to providing a progress report to the ASN within two years on this work. If this work is conclusive, EDF will submit a new application to the ASN in order to be able to use the vessel cap beyond 2024,” EDF said, noting it would comply with the ASN's final decision.



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