

Japan Should Terminate MOX (plutonium and uranium) Fuel Program, Cease All Shipments from Europe

Japan Should Terminate Fast Breeder Reactor and Reprocessing Programs

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“We call on the Japanese government and electric utilities to terminate this and future MOX fuel shipments and cease from placing en route countries at risk. We call on countries potentially on the route of future MOX fuel shipments to join us in demanding the termination of these dangerous shipments” stated BAN Hideyuki, secretary-general of Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC), Aileen Mioko SMITH, executive director of Green Action, and HOSHIKAWA Jun, executive director of Greenpeace Japan. Regional organizations which have protested past Japanese nuclear shipments include CARICOM (Caribbean Community), ACP(African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, SIDS (Small Island Developing States), and PIF (Pacific Islands Forum).

May 18, Tokyo, Japan — Today, May 18 2009, two British-flagged vessels, the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron arrived in Japan from France carrying 1.7 metric tons of weapons-usable plutonium contained in 69 assemblies of MOX (mixed plutonium and uranium oxide) fuel. This is the world's largest shipment of plutonium ever undertaken.

The MOX fuel, made from plutonium separated from Japanese spent fuel shipped to France for reprocessing, is to be used at the nuclear power plants of three Japanese electric utilities: Kyushu, Chubu, and Shikoku Electric Power. Fuel assemblies were delivered today to the Hamaoka Unit 4 plant of Chubu Electric. The ships will continue on to the Ikata Unit 3 plant in Ehime Prefecture and the Genkai Unit 3 plant in Saga Prefecture to deliver the remaining assemblies.

More shipments from France to more plants are scheduled to follow. Japanese nuclear power plants are designed to use uranium fuel, not MOX fuel.

MOX fuel shipments are unsafe and trample on the right of en route countries to protect their citizens and environment

On March 18th, Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (member of US Congress from the Territory of American Samoa) in a statement made on the floor of the US House of Representatives protested this latest MOX fuel shipment, stating, "This latest shipment of MOX fuel complements earlier shipments of spent fuel, about 170, from Japan to Europe. As usual, plans for this latest shipment, the largest so far, was covered in shrouds of secrecy without prior consultation or notification of en-route states. Yet, any accident involving the ships or their cargo could have catastrophic consequences on the environment and the population of en-route states. Moreover, with the increasing threat of piracy, the transported plutonium MOX fuel could easily fall in the hands of terrorists..."

Faleomavaega continues, "This unnecessary and unjustifiable shipment provides another example of the unacceptable risks and adverse impact the use of nuclear power and nuclear materials have on the environment and the lives of those involved. It demonstrates once again the imperialistic behavior of some major countries at the expense of others.... Europe, Japan and all nuclear states, should keep their nuclear materials and waste in their own backyard, and not endanger the lives of others."

In April 2009, a report commissioned by 70 nuclear free local authorities in the UK found that the British-flagged vessels the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron have serious design flaws. The Pacific Pintail (built in 1987) is still operating despite having been built to the same design and construction standards as predecessor vessels decommissioned or scrapped following discovery of "run away" corrosion. The Pacific Heron (built in 2008) has only small modifications from the original design of earlier ships. Available details of these modifications do not describe measures to prevent "run away" corrosion.

The report found both the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron are vulnerable to build-up of gas or moisture in their double-skinned hulls and "run away corrosion." The shippers boast that the ships are double-hulled, where in fact 40% of each vessel is only single-skinned hull. The study also found that claims that the ships are unsinkable "lack scientific and technical credibility." Moreover, emergency plans for coping with accidents are non-existent.

The Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron should never again be used for shipping MOX fuel.

Japan's plutonium utilization program should be terminated

This MOX fuel shipment is part of Japan's failed plutonium program. Originally begun in 1956, the program was to commercialize the fast breeder reactor by around 1970. The breeder development program is now 80 years behind schedule, with commercialization set for "around 2050." A commercial reprocessing plant was to be operational at Rokkasho by 1989, but has been delayed 16 times.

Both the fast breeder program and reprocessing program are in dire straits. There is now no date set for re-starting Monju, the prototype fast breeder reactor shutdown since a sodium fire accident in 1995, and the project is facing organizational collapse. The Rokkasho

reprocessing plant faces serious problems with its high-level waste vitrification facility and may never successfully operate.

Japan has built up tons of surplus plutonium in the meantime, and MOX fuel utilization in Japanese commercial reactors is Japan's attempt to consume some of that surplus plutonium, originally intended for the fast breeder reactor program. (Japan's plutonium surplus now stands at 38 tons of Japanese plutonium in France and the UK, and around 9 tons in Japan.) France's attempt to reduce its own stockpile of plutonium by using MOX fuel in its commercial nuclear power plants should serve as an example of how this program fails. The program increased rather than decreased France's plutonium surplus.

Japan's MOX fuel utilization program was to start in 1999. However, a quality control data falsification scandal, local citizen referendum, falsification of nuclear power plant inspection data, and a nuclear accident have delayed the program. Facing adamant local citizen opposition, the government's response was not to terminate the program but to implement coercive measures by jacking up subsidies, thus making it nearly impossible for local authorities to refuse the program.

Instead of terminating the failed fast breeder and reprocessing programs, the Japanese government's response was to elevate these failed projects to programs "central to the nation's technological development." The MOX fuel program is a by-product necessary for shoring up these failed programs.

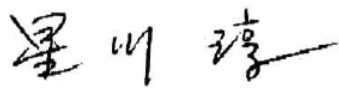
Citizens Protest MOX Program

Citizens protested the arrival of the MOX shipment in Omaezaki today. Protests were also held in Shizuoka and Saga on May 10. Aerial photos of a "No MOX" message formed by people at the protest in Saga are available on the following URL:
<http://www.greenaction-japan.org/modules/entop2/>


Citizen, consumer, and peace groups from every prefecture in Japan today submitted a petition to the Japanese government in opposition to the MOX fuel program and met with government officials from METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), the Atomic Energy Commission, and MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), stating the program forces nuclear waste onto the prefectures.



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For further information on the MOX fuel shipment see:

Green Action website: MOX Fuel Shipment — Issues and Controversies
<http://www.greenaction-japan.org/modules/wordpress0/index.php?p=68>

Citizens' Nuclear Information Center website, MOX and Pluthermal page:
<http://cnic.jp/english/topics/cycle/MOX/index.html>
