

Saga Citizens and Consumer Organizations Protest Arrival of MOX Fuel Shipment

Japan Should Terminate MOX (plutonium and uranium) Fuel, and Rokkasho Reprocessing Programs

For immediate release: May 23, 2009

Contact:

Aileen Mioko Smith (Green Action) +81-90-3620-9251

Philip White (Citizens' Nuclear Information Center) +81-3-3357-3800

May 23rd (Tokyo and Kyoto)---Today, at 6:45 am, amidst citizen protest, the British-flagged vessels the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron arrived at the port of Kyushu Electric's Genkai Nuclear Power Plant and unloaded 20 assemblies of MOX fuel for Genkai Unit 3. The nuclear power plant is scheduled to be the first to use MOX fuel on a commercial scale in Japan. The plan is that the fuel will be loaded during the plant's outage that begins this August. If everything goes according to plan, this will start Japan's beleaguered MOX fuel utilization program (called the "pluthermal" program).

About 100 Saga citizens and members of the large consumer food cooperative Green Coop of Kyushu, bearing banners reading "STOP MOX" and shouting "No Pluthermal in Saga!" and "Don't make Saga a Waste Dump!" were at the wooded peninsula where the Genkai plant is located, at the tip of Saga prefecture. They met with Saga Prefecture, Genkai Town, and Kyushu Electric to protest the arrival of the MOX fuel.

The ships first arrived in Japan on May 18th at the Omaezaki port in Shizuoka Prefecture from France, loaded with MOX fuel containing 1.7 metric tons of weapons-usable plutonium in 69 assemblies. These assemblies were fabricated for Chubu Electric's Hamaoka Unit 4 in Shizuoka prefecture (28 assemblies), Genkai Unit 3 (20 assemblies), and Shikoku Electric's Ikata Unit 3 in Ehime prefecture (21 assemblies). The ships had also been met with citizen protest at the Omaezaki port

"The MOX fuel use program is part of Japan's failed plutonium program. Use of MOX fuel has already been proven in France to increase rather than decrease plutonium surplus. The pluthermal program would just make Japan's stockpile problem worse. Japan should terminate its MOX use program, and shut the Rokkasho reprocessing plant which would also only increase Japan's plutonium stockpile." said Aileen Mioko Smith of Green Action and Hideyuki BAN, Secretary General of Citizens' Nuclear Information Center. (Japan already has 47 tons of plutonium: 38 tons in France and Britain, and about 9 tons in Japan. The pluthermal program is supposed to "consume" some of this plutonium.)

Earlier, on May 10th, Saga citizens held a rally protesting Kyushu Electric's MOX fuel program. Saga citizens now aim to gather 400,000 signatures from prefectural citizens (Saga's total population: 850,000) by the end of August. The petition is directed to governor Yasushi Furukawa and seeks the end to the MOX fuel program.

On May 18th, a total of 420 citizen, consumer, peace, and professional organizations from every prefecture in Japan submitted a petition to the Japanese government stating the pluthermal program forces MOX spent fuel waste onto the prefectures. (Currently, there is no destination for spent MOX fuel.)

To date, virtually none of the plutonium shipped from Europe to Japan, either in the form of plutonium dioxide or MOX fuel, has actually been used. A total of approximately 2.5 tons had been shipped (between 1984 and 2001), of which only about 30kg has been used (in Monju in 1995 before the prototype reactor had a sodium lead and fire accident).

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.

In April 2009, a report commissioned by 70 nuclear free local authorities in the UK found that the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Heron have serious design flaws.

It was reported on May 19th that the Pacific Heron had developed problems in one of its engines during the voyage but was able to continue using another independent engine. (No further details are known at the time of this writing.)

Green Action

Suite 103, 22-75 Tanaka Sekiden-cho
Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8203
Tel : +81-75-701-7223 Fax : +81-75-702-1952
Cell: +81-90-3620-9251
amsmith@gol.com

Citizens' Nuclear Information Center

Akebonobashi Co-op 2F-B, 8-5 Sumiyoshi-cho,
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 162-0065, Japan
Tel: +81-3-3357-3800 Fax: +81-3-3357-3801
cnic@nifty.com

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>