

GREEN ACTION

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Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) Subverts Own Post-Fukushima Safety Rules Allows Ohi Nuclear Power Plant Units 3 & 4 's Continued Operation

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Kyoto, Japan----The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) today approved continued operation of Kansai Electric's Ohi Nuclear Power Plant Units 3 and 4 located in Fukui Prefecture even though it is the first to admit the two plants do not meet new post-Fukushima regulatory standards. The standards will take effect Monday, 8 July.

"The NRA has taken the lead in ignoring compliance with its new nuclear regulatory rules which have been created to apply the lessons learned from the Fukushima accident, thus setting a dangerous precedent for 'bending the rules' and repeating the Fukushima accident," stated Aileen Mioko Smith, executive director of Green Action.

Under the new regulations, electric utilities cannot apply for a restart if any active fault investigation is being carried out on site. The Ohi Units 3 and 4 site is currently being investigated for an active earthquake fault. The Ohi units, therefore, do not pass even *application* requirements for restart under the new regulation. The NRA decision today will allow the units to operate until their September maintenance shutdown. The NRA says it did not review the on-site active earthquake fault issue at this time because "there wasn't enough time to do it."

As for tsunami requirements, the NRA committee members admit the Ohi units "do not meet the new standards."

In recent years, new evidence has shown that two earthquake faults FoB and FoA running close to the plant may be connected to the nearby Kumagawa fault. Although the NRA stated the utility must look into what will happen if these three earthquake faults move in unison, its method of review was even less rigid than the pre-Fukushima accident method utilized by its predecessor to review the FoB/FoA joint movement.

The NRA also didn't ask for the basis for the utility's claim that the control rods which are used to stop the reactors in the event of an accident will insert within the required time. Its predecessor required this type of information. (Kansai Electric claims, without substantiation, that the control rods will insert *faster* with the longer earthquake fault movement.) Is the NRA really a better regulator than the one Japan had before the Fukushima disaster?

There are other serious problems with Ohi Units 3 and 4. The new regulations require plants

to have in place a seismic-isolated building to cope with a severe accident, or an alternative if construction of the seismic-isolated building is not complete. Such a facility proved crucial during the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Ohi's building will not be completed until 2015. The "alternative" approved by the NRA is a conference room adjoining the Ohi Units 1 and 2 control room. On 21 June, the Nuclear Regulation Agency admitted that this Ohi conference room is not earthquake resistant. The NRA also assumes Ohi Units 1 and 2 will not be facing a crisis of their own in the event of such an earthquake and accident.

The Ohi Units 3 and 4 Review undertaken by the NRA was done mostly in secret with the utility, Kansai Electric. Although the public review meetings were U-streamed, the NRA and Nuclear Regulatory Agency also met with Kansai Electric 80 times behind closed doors. The substantive contents of these meetings remain secret. At the start of the Review, the NRA made strong statements, but as the Review progressed, it turned around completely to favor the utility. At the end the NRA's main argument for allowing the units to operate was, "There will be no serious safety problem that will occur immediately."

The NRA claims it will not make Ohi Units 3 and 4 an exception to the rule. With four Japanese utilities scheduled to apply for restart of a dozen plants on 8 July, the NRA's approval of Ohi's continued operation today, albeit until its September maintenance shutdown, does not bode well.