

Utility to finish upgrading safety of 2 online reactors

The Associated Press

TOKYO, April 18 (Kyodo) — Kansai Electric Power Co. said in a report submitted to regulators Thursday it will finish necessary preparations by the end of June to make its two reactors meet new safety requirements coming into force the following month.

If the Nuclear Regulation Authority acknowledges that the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture on the Sea of Japan coast have no serious safety problems, they will remain online without being asked to suspend their operations when regulations will come into force in July.

The two reactors are the only ones in Japan that are entitled to undergo the NRA's safety assessments before the new requirements for commercial reactors, to be introduced in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, take effect.

The new requirements include readying an emergency command center to deal with severe nuclear accidents, but Kansai Electric said it will use the basement floor of an office building next to the No. 1 reactor turbine building for that purpose until a seismic-isolated building is completed in 2015.

If the basement cannot be used because it is flooded by tsunami waves, the utility will use a meeting room next to the No. 3 and 4 reactor control room. The room will be equipped with masks and other protective clothing, the report said.

Kansai Electric also has to deploy additional power source vehicles to keep key systems operating during emergencies as well as two water cannons to be used to prevent radioactive contamination from spreading outside the plant's premises.

But Ikuo Morinaka, the utility's executive, told reporters that necessary measures will be taken by the end of June and showed confidence of being allowed to continue operating its reactors through September when they have to enter a period for mandatory routine checkups.

While plant operators are asked to take countermeasures against tsunami, the Oi plant is located on ground higher than the 2.85-meter-high tsunami that is assumed to hit the area so it does not have to build a breakwater wall.

Still, Kansai Electric said it is building a seawall to further improve safety.

The new regulations also request reactors to be equipped with filtered venting systems to reduce radioactive substances when gas and steam need to be released

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to prevent damage to reactor containment vessels.

But utilities will be allowed to spend up to five years for installing the systems for pressurized water reactors, including the Oi No. 3 and 4 reactors.

Using the report, the NRA will start its safety assessment on the Oi reactors from Friday.

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