

Discussion to begin on high-grade nuke waste

It is about time after the disastrous arrogance of fifteen years ago and the deaths that occurred then then.

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Korea will launch a national energy committee in September that will work to help build public consensus for the establishment of a high-grade nuclear waste site, the government said yesterday.

The 25-member committee based on the new basic energy act passed by the National Assembly on Feb. 9 is to be chaired by the president and consist of government officials, civic group leaders and industry experts.

"One of the key agenda items that will be touched on is the building of the high grade nuclear waste site," said Lee Won-geol, the vice industry and energy minister.

He said with the nation's capacity to store highly radioactive atomic waste likely to reach its limit in 2016, there is a need for the public to confront the matter in the near future.

High-grade atomic waste includes spent fuel from atomic power stations. At present the waste is held in specially built holding areas on the grounds of the nation's nuclear power plants.

"The government plans to invite people who are critical of the government's nuclear policy in general to sit on the committee, to ensure feedback and to win broad support later on," Mr. Lee said.

Korea currently operates 20 commercial reactors that provide 40 percent of the country's electricity needs. It plans to steadily increase this number in the future.

It took the country 20 years to decide on a site for the much safer, low and intermediate-level radioactive waste repository that was agreed to locate last year by the city of Gyeongju on the country's east coast.

Seoul had pledged to give 300 billion won (\$309 million), build a multi-billion won sub-atomic particle accelerator, and relocate the headquarters of the state-run Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. to the city for agreeing to host the repository site. Officials have hinted that more would be offered to the region that accepts the high-grade waste site.

In addition to helping win support for the hosting of the waste dump, the committee will work to iron out differences between various energy sectors that compete with each other.

"There are conflicts of interest between the gas, oil and coal industries as well as operators of district heating and other services," a working level official said.

It will also be tasked with coming up with a comprehensive plan every five years that will outline the course of the country's future energy policies for the next 20 years.