

Restart Monju reactor: atomic blueprint

The plant needs to be restarted rapidly now that JNC has been reorganized and TEPCO is slowly emerging from hiding its activities. Successful operation would contribute to public confidence.

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The Atomic Energy Commission released a nuclear policy blueprint Tuesday that calls for continued pursuit of the "pluthermal" program and a restart of the trouble-plagued Monju fast-breeder reactor.

The commission, which operates under the Cabinet Office, is conducting a review of the nation's nuclear energy policy in the wake of a spate of accidents and damage cover-ups at atomic plants.

The blueprint is designed to serve as a basis for a long-term government atomic energy plan to be drafted next year.

It describes nuclear energy as a "potent and important option" to provide a sufficient level of energy to the nation while "suppressing" carbon monoxide emissions.

The pluthermal project involves the use of plutonium as fuel in the production of energy, while the fast-breeder reactor generates plutonium in the process of producing energy.

Plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel would be burned at light-water reactors.

The "basic thinking" nuclear energy blueprint -- as the commission puts it -- promises a flexible approach that takes into account the concerns of communities where its pluthermal and fast-breeder reactor projects are located.

Monju, in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, has been shut down since the prototype fast-breeder reactor suffered a massive coolant leak and was subject to a subsequent coverup attempt in 1995.

The commission said the "ultimate aim" in the nuclear fuel cycle is to establish a system in which fast-breeder reactors effectively use uranium resources.

The commission said the nuclear fuel cycle involving pluthermal and fast-breeder technology would cut the cost of power generation by an estimated 2 percent to 3 percent from the current system involving the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel.