

Atomic commission votes to continue policy of reprocessing spent nuke fuel

I don't think there is much option if energy independence is still a requirement. All uranium is imported.

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The Atomic Energy Commission's draft for a new nuclear policy plan advocates maintaining the current policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel.

According to the draft, unveiled Friday, reprocessing is "superior" to burial due to potential advantages in terms of energy security and environmental protection.

Burying the spent fuel, however, is far more economical.

The commission released a new estimate that reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel would cost 42.9 trillion yen, while burying it would cost between 30 trillion yen and 38.6 trillion yen. The estimate was based on predicted power generation between 2002 and 2059.

It was the first time for the panel to calculate and release a total cost estimate. The commission had previously only disclosed cost in terms of per kilowatt of power generation.

The draft, prepared by the panel's secretariat, was presented during the day's meeting of the commission, which is working to revise the nation's long-term nuclear policy.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry had estimated it would cost about 19 trillion yen over a 40-year period to reprocess spent nuclear fuel at a plant in Aomori Prefecture. The panel's estimate is higher because it includes expenses for processing nuclear fuel and waste.

In drafting the plan, the secretariat compared the merits and demerits of both burying and reprocessing spent nuclear fuel.

The officials said reprocessing spent fuel is "superior in a comprehensive manner" from perspectives such as energy security and potential application to the environment.

The draft claims that the policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel has helped establish a relationship of trust with people living around reprocessing plants and an international reputation for Japan's technologies. Such achievements have "great worth to be