

Safety review sought for new Japanese reactor

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Chugoku Electric Power Company has initiated the regulatory process for starting up unit 3 at its Shimane nuclear power plant by applying to the Japanese regulator for a review to assess its compliance with revised safety standards. Construction of the 1373 MWe advanced boiling water reactor (ABWR) is nearing completion.



The Shimane 3 ABWR (Image: Chugoku)

Construction of Shimane 3, in Japan's Shimane prefecture, started in December 2005. In February 2011 - a month before the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant - Chugoku announced that fuelling and start-up of the reactor had been delayed by three months, from March 2011 until June 2011, owing to a fault with the control rod drive mechanism. Commercial operation had correspondingly been put back from December 2011 to March 2012.

Following the Nuclear Regulation Authority's (NRA's) approval of the basic design earthquake ground motion for unit 2 at the Shimane site, Chugoku announced in February this year that it would seek to start up unit 3.

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Under Japan's revised nuclear regulations, plant operators are required to apply to the NRA for: permission to make changes to the reactor installation; approval of its construction plan to strengthen the plant; and, final safety inspections to ensure the unit meets new safety requirements. Operators are required to add certain safety-enhancing equipment within five years of receiving the NRA's approval of a reactor engineering work programme.

In May, Chugoku requested permission from the Shimane prefectural government and the Matsue city government to apply to the NRA for safety conformity inspections of Shimane 3.

Having received those consents yesterday, Chugoku announced it has today submitted its application to the NRA for those checks, initiating the regulatory process for starting up Shimane 3.

Chugoku becomes the second Japanese utility to apply to the NRA for pre-operation safety inspections for a new nuclear power reactor since the Fukushima Daiichi accident. The first was Japan Electric Power Development Corp (J-Power), which applied in December 2014 for inspections of unit 1 at its Ohma nuclear power plant, also an ABWR, being built in Aomori prefecture. However, with construction of Shimane 3 more advanced than Ohma 1, Shimane 3 is likely to be the first new reactor to begin operating in Japan.

Researched and written by World Nuclear News

source:

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