Utility Gets $12.8B Nuclear Crisis Bailout

MARI YAMAGUCHI,Associated Press

ONAGAWA, Japan (AP) — The Japanese operator of the nuclear power plant devastated in last year's disasters received a 1 trillion yen ($12.8 billion) bailout Tuesday, putting it under government ownership, while international experts visited another plant that survived the tsunami's impact.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. apologized for the "inconvenience and anxiety" caused by the accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant in northeastern Japan, and for raising

electricity charges to cover the costs of dealing with the crisis.

The company faces massive compensation demands from those forced to evacuate and whose land and products were contaminated by radiation leaks following the crisis that began March 11 last year when Japan's northeast was hit by a massive earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO must also shoulder the enormous costs of decommissioning three reactors with melted cores and placing nuclear fuel rods from a fourth reactor into safe storage.

On Tuesday a group of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency inspected a nuclear power plant just north of Fukushima that managed to avoid a similar catastrophe.

The 20-member IAEA mission, the first to visit the Onagawa nuclear plant since the crisis, aims to make its own assessment of how much damage the plant sustained from the magnitude-9.0 quake.

The three reactors at the Onagawa plant, about 120 kilometers (74 miles) north of Fukushima Dai-ichi, suffered temblors that exceeded their design capacity and the basement of one of its reactor buildings flooded, though the plant was able to maintain its cooling capacity. The reactors shut down without any damage to their cores.

The mission, led by seismologist Sujit Samaddar, will inspect equipment and facilities at the plant through Aug. 9.

In May, the last of Japan's 50 working reactors were turned off as safety checks were carried out, but two are now back online. Despite protests, the government is eager to restart reactors because of the ballooning cost of fuel imports to keep the power supply running.

A series of investigation reports, including one released earlier this month by a government-appointed panel, criticized cozy relationships among the government, regulators and TEPCO. The reports also blamed TEPCO for underestimating the tsunami risk faced by the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant despite a history of quakes in the region.

Fukushima Dai-ichi's seawall was built to withstand a tsunami of up 5.7 meters (18.7 feet), much smaller than the tsunami which swept through the plant in March 2011. Onagawa's seawall, which survived the tsunami, was nearly 14 meters (46 feet) high. It has since been extended to nearly 17 meters (56 feet) above sea level.

—

Associated Press writer Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/30/2014 - 7:01pm*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2012/07/utility-gets-128b-nuclear-crisis-bailout?qt-most_popular=1