



Japan PM Wants Another Nuclear Plant Closed Over Quake Fears

Japan urged a power company today to temporarily shut down operations at another nuclear plant that straddles a major fault line for fear it would not survive a major earthquake and tsunami.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan said during a news conference today that he requested the suspension of reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear plant over safety concerns, citing a study that said there was an 87 percent chance of a magnitude 8.0 earthquake striking central Japan within the next 30 years.

The Hamaoka plant is located in Shizuoka, 155 miles west of Tokyo, and sits on an active earthquake fault. Officials estimate the shutdown could last two years.

With the plant supplying energy to about 16 million people in central Japan, a shutdown is sure to further strain the country's power supply, already hurting as a result of the crippled Fukushima reactors. Hamaoka powers regions that include Aichi, home to Toyota Motor Corp headquarters.

"I've made this request out consideration for the safety of the Japanese people," Kan said. "If there were to be a serious accident at the Hamaoka power plant, it would have a catastrophic impact on all of Japan."

The government asked plant operator Chubu Electric Power Co. to suspend two running reactors and a third already shut for a regular inspection. The request came one day after Economy, Trade, and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda visited the plant and raised concerns about the facility's safety measures. After reviewing Hamaoka's quake and tsunami drills, Kaieda suggested anti-disaster measures in place were insufficient.

The inspection of Hamaoka and all of Japan's 54 nuclear plants was prompted by the disaster at the troubled Fukushima Daichi nuclear plant following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. The one-two punch crippled reactors along Japan's northeast coast, triggered hydrogen explosions, and radiation leaks in the world's second-worst nuclear crisis.

Hamaoka is the only plant so far where the government has asked that operations be halted until the utility can implement safety measures. Chubu

Electric has already drawn up plans to build a 40 to 50 foot seawall along a mile long stretch off the Pacific coast. But completion of that wall is expected to take about three years.

Chubu Electric has not responded to the government's request for temporary suspension of operations, but Shizuoka Governor Heita Kawakatsu called it a "wise decision."

"I pay my respect for the decision. We must do our utmost to secure alternative sources of energy," the governor said in a statement.

Kan said the government would offer its full support to Chubu Electric, once they halt the reactors, but he called on the Japanese people to conserve energy to avoid future outages.

"The risk of a power shortage is a serious concern," he said. "I urge the people of the region and people of Japan to work closely together to come up with ways to conserve power."



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