

AEC moves response center to HQ, calls for repository

By William C. Pao

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In its ongoing effort to protect the public from the harms of radiation, the Atomic Energy Council (AEC) will continue to monitor the country's nuclear activities and enforce regulations on the use of radioactive materials, said Ouyang Min-Sheng, chairman of the council.

To better supervise the daily operations of Taiwan's three nuclear power plants, the AEC last year moved its National Nuclear Emergency Response Center from [headquarters of Taiwan Power Co.](#) to the council's Yungho, Taipei County building, where a rotating two-member team can monitor situations at the plants via online connections 24 hours a day.

Should a crisis situation arise, the National Nuclear Emergency Management Committee comprised of representatives of the central and local governments will meet at the center, which is equipped with advanced computer systems as well as [lodging facility](#) to accommodate committee members if the crisis takes a long time to resolve, he added.

"It's pretty much on par with similar facilities in more advanced countries," Ouyang said.

Taiwan has made strides in protecting the public from the hazards of radioactive materials, said Ouyang. He mentioned the Ionizing Radiation Protection Law, which went into effect on Feb. 21 and gave the AEC the authority to fine violators of the law.

But Ouyang said Taiwan should do more to keep up with other countries in terms of the treatment of nuclear waste. Specifically, he cited the lack of a low-level radioactive waste repository as a major concern.

Taiwan is currently [one of the few countries](#) in the world without such a facility to [permanently dispose of radioactive](#) waste generated by power plants and other businesses using nuclear energy to run their operations, Ouyang stressed.

Construction firms and steel factories, for example, are known to use radioactive sources such as cobalt-60 and gamma ray for quality of management purposes, and these materials are tremendously harmful to the human body, [not properly managed](#), Ouyang said.

"We must fulfill our commitments as a member of the global community," Ouyang said. "Taiwan has made advances in the information technology industry and other fields, yet [much remains to be done](#) in terms of nuclear waste [management](#). This is unacceptable to modernized nations."

The main issue facing the AEC and Taiwan Power Co., which is in charge of building the repository, is choosing a location. A proposal drafted by the council regarding the procedure for site selection is pending in the Legislative Yuan. Once passed, the law would require the process to be delayed no further, Ouyang said, adding he is “optimistic” about the proposal’s passage.

While the chairman did not specifically mention locations being considered by the council, he said the repository will be built in Taiwan, as international protocol dictates that a country should build its low-level waste facilities on its soil instead of [in](#) another country.

Moreover, the repository will be built at a site where it can be seen, Ouyang said.

“If it’s safe, then people should be able to see it,” he said. “What we need is supervision by the entire population, instead of just a particular government agency. And allowing them to see the site would be the best way to monitor the facility.”

Commenting on possible protests staged by nearby residents, he said: “We have been taking the easy way out, backtracking from our plans in the face of mass demonstrations. Yet we must be active, rather than passive. We must help the people understand the importance of having such a facility.”

“In addition,” he continued, “the cost for building a low-level nuclear waste repository is low, and I’m confident we can build it in a way that it resembles a forest park rather than a treatment facility.”

Ouyang said the country still depends much on nuclear power generation, which accounts for 20 percent of all types of power generation. The number would not change even after the completion of the controversial fourth nuclear power plant in Kungliao, Taipei County, as demand for power is on the rise, he said.

The fourth nuclear plant is an emotional and divisive issue here in Taiwan, which has brought anti-nuclear activists, including former Democratic Progressive Party chairman Lin Yi-hsiung, to take to the streets and stage mass rallies against its construction.

The plant is almost 50 percent complete now, Ouyang said.

While construction will go on, Ouyang said the AEC does not rule out the possibility of eliminating or reducing the [share](#) of the country’s nuclear power plants once other energy sources are being found. The AEC is currently doing research on [fuel cell and](#) renewable energy such as solar , he added.

“Urging the public to save energy continues to be on the top of agenda,” he said.