

Japan heads back to nuclear zero for reactor checkups

September 2 2013



Kansai Electric Power engineers check readings at the Oi nuclear plant on July 19, 2012. Workers will shut off generation at the plant by early Tuesday.

Workers will switch off one of Japan's two working reactors Monday, with the other set for shutdown later this month and no restarts in sight amid continued public hostility to nuclear power.

Kansai Electric Power will start reducing [generating power](#) at its Unit

No. 3 at the Oi plant, Fukui prefecture, western Japan, shortly before 5:00 pm (0800 GMT), a company spokesman said.

The reactor will be fully shut down by early Tuesday in readiness for inspections legally mandated within 13 months of the start of commercial operations, he said.

The reactor is one of the only two still generating power in Japan. The other one, Unit No. 4 at Oi, is to be switched off on September 15.

It is not known when they will resume operations because they will be assessed under a set of guidelines recently drawn up by the nuclear watchdog, according to Kansai Electric.

The two reactors were restarted—despite [public opposition](#)—in July last year after passing safety tests, ending a brief period in which no [atomic power](#) was generated in Japan. They were the only units to be brought back online after undergoing such tests in the aftermath of the disaster in March 2011 at Fukushima.

Dormant power

Japan's last two working nuclear reactors to be shut town



Graphic locating nuclear plants in Japan. The last two working reactors will be shutdown this month for testing.

There, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and the tsunami it caused crippled reactor [cooling systems](#), sparking meltdowns and spewing [radioactive materials](#) in the world's worst atomic disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Japan has turned to pricey fossil-fuel alternatives to fill the gap left by the shutdown of atomic plants, which had supplied about one-third of resource-poor Japan's electricity before the disaster.

Operator Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) has been struggling to contain the crisis at Fukushima, which has been hit by a series of mishaps that have cast doubt on the utility's ability to fix the crisis.

Recent months have brought a steady stream of news about leaks of water contaminated with radiation as well as a blackout caused by a gnawing rat that left cooling pools without [power](#) for more than a day.

The company said Sunday it had found highly radioactive water dripping from a pipe connecting two coolant tanks at one of four radiation hotspots.

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