

guardian.co.uk

New fire at quake-damaged Japanese nuclear power plant

No radiation leak but latest setback throws into doubt reopening of Kashiwazaki-Karaki power station

Justin McCurry in Tokyo
guardian.co.uk, Thursday 5 March 2009 11.42 GMT

A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

The immediate future of the world's biggest nuclear power station was in doubt today after its eighth fire since it was closed almost two years ago by an earthquake.



Quake damage at the plant in 2007. Photograph: Koichi

Kamoshida/Getty Images

The fire at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power station in Japan came as its operators await local authorities' approval to restart one of its seven reactors.

A 39-year-old worker received slight burns in the fire, which was quickly put out and did not cause a radiation leak, according to Tokyo Electric Power.

The plant, in Niigata prefecture north-west of Tokyo, was shut down indefinitely after a magnitude 6.8 earthquake caused a fire and radiation leaks in July 2007.

Japan's nuclear safety watchdog ordered Tokyo Electric to improve safety after another fire last December, but earlier this year the government approved the restarting of the No 7 reactor – the newest and least damaged of the nuclear generators – after deeming it safe.

"It is very regrettable that another fire occurred, even after our order," the deputy trade minister, Harufumi Mochizuki, told reporters. "However, our view that safety at the No 7 reactor is restored remains unchanged."

Tokyo Electric needs the approval of the prefectural government and local residents before it can restart the reactor. About 600,000 residents have signed a petition opposing the restart.

Government inspectors will visit the scene of the latest fire tomorrow. Local government leaders will meet next week to discuss the plant's future.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2011