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Decommissioning permit issued for German reactor

06 April 2023

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The Baden-Württemberg Ministry of the Environment has granted utility EnBW approval to decommission and dismantle unit 2 of its Neckarwestheim nuclear power plant, which is due to shut down later this month. Meanwhile, the removal of fuel from unit 2 of EnBW's Philippsburg plant has now been completed.

Neckarwestheim (Image: Daniel Maier-Gerber / EnBW)

"The dismantling programme for the fifth and last nuclear power plant in Baden-Württemberg has thus been approved in all sub-scopes within the framework of nuclear law," EnBW said. The company had previously obtained decommissioning permits for Neckarwestheim 1, the Obrigheim plant and for units 1 and 2 of the Philippsburg plant. EnBW applied in July 2016 for a permit to decommission and dismantle Neckarwestheim 2.

"EnBW is thus the first operator of nuclear power plants in Germany for whose nuclear power plants all dismantling permits have been obtained," the company said. "In addition, EnBW is the only operator in Germany to date that has already received dismantling approval for two plants before they were finally shut down. In 2019, EnBW had done this for the first time for Philippsburg 2 and was now able to repeat this for Neckarwestheim 2".

EnBW noted, "After the public announcement, the approval can be challenged during the appeal period of one month at the Mannheim Administrative Court".

In August 2011, the 13th amendment of the Nuclear Power Act came into effect, which underlined the political will to phase out nuclear power in Germany. As a result, eight units were closed down immediately: EnBW's Phillipsburg 1 and Neckarwestheim 1; EOn's Isar 1 and Unterweser; RWE's Biblis A and B and Vattenfall's Brunsbüttel and Krümmel. The remaining reactors were scheduled to shut by the end of 2022.

However, in October last year, the German federal cabinet approved an executive decision by Chancellor Olaf Scholz to allow the country's three remaining nuclear power plants to continue operating beyond the end of 2022. It approved a draft amendment to the Atomic Energy Act which enables the Emsland, Isar 2 and Neckarwestheim 2 plants to operate until 15 April 2023 at the latest.

"This means that Neckarwestheim 2 can be quickly shut down and dismantled after the statutory end of power operation on April 15, 2023," said Environment Minister Thekla Walker. "The Ministry of the Environment, as the responsible supervisory authority, will closely and intensively accompany the dismantling that is now beginning".

Neckarwestheim 2 is a 1400 MWe pressurised water reactor that began operating in 1989. It generated more than 11 TWh of electricity in 2022. Unit 1 of the Neckarwestheim plant was shut down in 2011 and has been dismantled since 2017.

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"Today's receipt of the dismantling permit for Neckarwestheim 2 is not only an important step for the Neckarwestheim site, but also a strong signal that EnBW is serious about implementing the energy transition," said Jörg Michels, Managing Director of the EnBW nuclear power division. "Our master plan for decommissioning, which we defined more than ten years ago, aims, among other things, to ensure the safe and speedy decommissioning of our nuclear power plants. Since dismantling requires approval, our strategy was designed to obtain these approvals. Now we are the first in Germany to have all the necessary permits. We are very proud of this and would like to thank all of our colleagues who have made this possible with their years of commitment".

Philippsburg now fuel-free

The last fuel rods from the Philippsburg nuclear power plant, also in the state of Baden-Württemberg, have today been removed the site.

Since March 2022, the fuel still remaining in the storage pool of unit 2 has been packed into 40 casks and transported to the onsite interim storage facility of BGZ Gesellschaft für Zwischenstorage mbH.

"This means that another important milestone in the dismantling of the Philippsburg nuclear power plant has been reached - and with it a valuable gain in safety," said Environment Minister Thekla Walker. "It is now a matter of continuing to implement the nuclear phase-out in Baden-Württemberg in a consistent and safety-oriented manner".

Philippsburg unit 1 has been fuel-free since 2016 and is in the advanced phase of dismantling. The dismantling of central parts of unit 2 can now also begin.

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