

Austrian Non-Paper on Potential On-site Verification of Nuclear Power Installations with a View to Nuclear Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Response

RATIONALE

The rulebook on nuclear safety, emergency preparedness and response needs a certain rewriting after the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima. Whilst nuclear safety remains the prerogative of national competence, the global dimension of the accident in Fukushima invites for a global view and thus participatory understanding of nuclear safety in the global perspective.

As a starting point, current IAEA standards on nuclear safety should be enhanced, taking fully into account lessons learnt from Fukushima and stress tests performed by a large number of countries. At the same time, an effective implementation of obligations and standards by operators and regulators would be essential for advancing the cause of safety and emergency management. Making safety standards obligatory for the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) would therefore seem a good way to strengthen the international safety regime. In this context, on-site visits would likewise seem an effective means of fostering the implementation of recommendations put forward by the IAEA and its Member States, as it is the case under the CNS and other conventions, and would be fully in line with Article 12 A 2 of the Statute of the IAEA.

A decision for on-site visits of NPPs should be made on the basis of appropriate, evident and transparent criteria. IAEA Member States should have the right to call for such visits on a voluntary basis as is done under OSART and IRRS missions. Random selection could however serve as an important additional tool. Key elements of such visits would be both the verification of national nuclear safety reports provided under the IAEA Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) as well as the assessment of the degree of implementation of IAEA nuclear safety standards, emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

The number of random visits per year would be limited. Site visits would be conducted by teams of international and IAEA experts, thereby offering the advantage of a broader basis for recommendations and conclusions. The reports could subsequently be made available to national nuclear (safety) authorities and IAEA Member States. Moreover, reports could be published on the IAEA's website.

The basic approach of such visits would be non-confrontational. On-site visits should however commit Member States, and build upon the national reporting under the CNS, other relevant conventions, or recommendations made after earlier visits.

ON-SITE VISITS

On-site visits are part of a wider approach to ensure and verify that the actual situation at a given site corresponds to the standards set by international, national and local authorities or the regulator respectively. International on-site visits based upon commonly accepted standards would allow for the international community as well as the national authorities to step up the level of accountability, and to exclude potential major incidents as far as possible. Moreover, they would motivate operators to be fully prepared in the case of an incident.

NUCLEAR SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE COMPONENTS

The principal aim and thus the mandate of the visiting team would be to monitor the degree of implementation of nuclear safety and emergency preparedness and response standards in accordance with the respective IAEA instruments as well as the implementation of responsibilities of Contracting Parties under pertinent international conventions. (CNS; Convention on Early Notification and Assistance, IAEA EPR Standards, Guidance and Tools). Based upon these standards, a manual for visiting teams would be elaborated to allow for the actual application of standardised approaches and thus establish comparative results. The implementation of recommendations would then become mandatory through national regulatory decrees.

THE WAY AHEAD

In order to elaborate a system of on-site visits and respective model agreements it would seem appropriate to include this topic as an agenda item in the Action Plan to be elaborated as a deliverable of the IAEA Nuclear Safety Conference 20-24 June 2011 in Vienna.