

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT OF SPENT FUEL FROM  
NUCLEAR POWER REACTORS: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE BACK END  
OF THE FUEL CYCLE

15 June 2015

Vienna

Opening Remarks

Thank you, Madam President.

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to welcome you to this *International Conference on Management of Spent Fuel from Nuclear Power Reactors*.

Spent fuel management is an essential component of the nuclear fuel cycle. Supporting the safe management of spent fuel, and of radioactive waste, is a key IAEA activity. We develop safety standards and guidance, publish technical reports, and organize training courses, workshops and technical meetings.

Last September, we devoted our annual Scientific Forum to the subject of Radioactive Waste Management. We are organizing an international conference on the same subject in 2016.

Waste disposal is often cited as one of the major problems facing nuclear power. In fact, the nuclear industry has been managing waste disposal for more than half a century. Dozens of facilities for low-level and intermediate-level nuclear waste are in operation throughout the world.

As far as the management of high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel is concerned, good progress has been made in recent years, especially in Finland, Sweden and France. I have had an opportunity to visit the ONKALO facility in Finland, where a repository for the final disposal of spent fuel is being built deep underground, and the Hard Rock Laboratory in Sweden. They are impressive sites.

I was also impressed by the briefing on the Cigeo project, which I received from the head of the French national radioactive waste management agency, Andra, during my recent visit to France. I understand that it is now at the licence application stage.

It will still be some years before the first deep geological repositories for nuclear spent fuel become operational. But the progress being made in this area deserves to be better known.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since your last meeting five years ago, the most important event in the nuclear sector was the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan in March 2011. Last week, I presented the IAEA report on the accident to our Board of Governors.

Extensive efforts have been made throughout the world in the last four years to improve safety at nuclear power plants and at facilities housing nuclear material.

I know that those of you working with the nuclear fuel cycle have extensively reviewed your practices and procedures since the accident and taken additional steps to improve safety.

This includes improving transparency and the exchange of information between countries. Conferences such as this have an important role to play.

Despite the Fukushima Daiichi accident, many countries continue to see an important role for nuclear power as part of their energy mix. They believe that nuclear power can help to improve energy security, mitigate the effects of climate change, and make economies more competitive.

IAEA projections indicate that the use of nuclear power throughout the world will continue to grow in the coming decades. The volume of spent fuel will also continue to grow and it is essential that it is managed safely.

Since your last conference, the IAEA has launched a programme to demonstrate the long-term performance of dry stored spent fuel and related storage system components. We are also finalising a new guidance document on the use of dual-purpose casks for both transport and storage.

In 2012, we published a new safety guide on the storage of spent nuclear fuel. It is being revised to take into account the lessons learned from the Fukushima Daiichi accident.

As you may know, the IAEA provides extensive support to countries which are considering, or embarking upon, nuclear power programmes.

One of the points which I stress in my meetings with leaders from these newcomer countries is the vital importance of having “cradle-to-grave” plans in place for both spent fuel and radioactive waste.

I strongly encourage countries with existing nuclear power programmes, and experience of the back end of the fuel cycle, to share their experience with newcomer countries to ensure that best practice is implemented everywhere.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The sub-title of your conference is “an integrated approach to the back end of the fuel cycle.”**

**The IAEA considers it important for practitioners to take a holistic approach to the fuel cycle and remain aware of issues outside their particular speciality.**

**I wish you every success with this important conference and I look forward to learning about the outcome.**

**Thank you.**