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International nuclear safety: IAEA: additional activities

Twenty-five years after the disaster at Chernobyl, events at Fukushima have reminded us of the harm that nuclear accidents can cause. While it would be wrong to equate the two accidents, it is clear we need to look beyond a business as usual approach to international nuclear safety.

The most effective and efficient means to improve international nuclear safety is through the IAEA. The IAEA is pivotal to a number of international nuclear safety instruments, many of which came into being or were strengthened in the wake of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. While the international nuclear safety standards administered by the IAEA and its member states are extensive, some gaps remain.

Nuclear incidents independent fact-finding and review missions

The member states of the IAEA could consider independent fact-finding and review missions when nuclear incidents occur, perhaps at INES level 3 and above. Such missions incidents would improve transparency, boost confidence and enable shared learning. The missions could focus on issues such as the root cause, contributing factors and measures that could avoid or mitigate similar incidents. The results could be presented as recommendations to the operator, member state/s and the IAEA. The IAEA could draw the mission's team from a pool of experts nominated by member states.

A request to the IAEA to support such missions could be made at the General Conference in September this year.

Nuclear safety missions

The IAEA could also instigate regular (perhaps biennial) nuclear safety missions by the IAEA to member states that are prepared to accept to such missions. Such missions would be broader in scope and more frequent than current IRRS or OSART missions. The missions could perhaps use experts drawn from outside a country's region, with recommendations from the safety mission being made to the country/ies concerned. The preparation for such missions could include consideration of relevant information held across the Agency. Industry could also be involved in informing the IAEA of recent developments that pertain to nuclear safety, so that the IAEA could take this into account in safety inspections. This would involve the IAEA and the nuclear industry associations building stronger links and communications channels.

A request to the IAEA to support such missions could be made at the General Conference in September this year.

Better national reporting

National reports under the Convention on Nuclear Safety could expressly address compliance with IAEA safety standards and respond to IAEA commentary on previous (or even current) national reports. National reports could also reflect the results and responses to independent nuclear incident fact-finding and review missions and regular nuclear safety missions by the IAEA.

Changes to put this into effect could be made to CNS procedures at a scheduled meeting of the parties to the CNS.