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International Nuclear Safety Experts Conclude IAEA Peer Review of Korea's Regulatory System

22 July 2011 | An international team of senior nuclear safety experts concluded today a two-week mission to review the regulatory framework for nuclear safety in the Republic of Korea.

The team identified good practices and gave advice on areas for future improvements. The IAEA has conveyed the team's main conclusions to the Government of Korea, while the final report will be submitted by the end of summer 2011.

At the request of the Korean Government, the IAEA assembled a team of 16 senior regulatory experts from 14 nations to conduct the Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) mission involving the Korean Ministry for Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and the Korean Institute for Nuclear Safety (KINS). The mission is a peer-review based on the *IAEA Safety Standards*.

"This was the first IRRS mission organized after Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident and it included a review of the regulatory implications of that event," explains Denis Flory, IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security.

William Borchardt, Executive Director of Operations from the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Team Leader of this mission commended the Korean authorities for their openness and commitment to sharing their experience with the world's nuclear safety community.

"IRRS missions such as the one that was just concluded here in the Republic of Korea are crucial to the enhancement of nuclear safety worldwide," he said.

The IRRS team reviewed Korea's current regulatory framework while acknowledging the fact that the country's Government has already decided to establish, as of October 2011, a new independent regulatory body to be called Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC). As a consequence, KINS role will be as a regulatory expert organization reporting to the NSC, while MEST's role will be restricted to promoting the utilization of nuclear energy.

The IRRS team identified particular strengths in the Korean regulatory system, including:

- The Korean government, through the activities of MEST and KINS, has implemented a technically capable and effective nuclear safety regulatory program. KINS is an entrusted governmental corporation that functions as a nuclear safety regulation body. The team's findings note of the fact that the current Korean nuclear regulator is a combination of MEST and KINS;
- Transition to a new regulatory framework has the potential to enhance regulatory independence, expertise and transparency; however implementation details have yet to be finalized. Therefore, the team could not make a conclusion regarding the planned framework's effectiveness; and
- Korea's response to the accident at Fukushima has been prompt and effective. Communications with the public, development of actions for improvement and coordination with international stakeholders were of high quality.

Among the good practices identified by the IRRS Review Team are the following:

- The regulatory body of Korea has a clear and structured national approach for nuclear safety;
- Korea strongly supports the global nuclear safety regime and provides training at national and international levels;
- KINS has a high level of technical competence and has implemented an effective human capital program;
- KINS performs detailed and comprehensive safety assessment using a broad range of deterministic and probabilistic codes and methods; and
- KINS has a comprehensive integrated computerized information and data management system.

The IRRS Review Team identified certain issues warranting attention or in need of improvement and believes that consideration of these would enhance the overall performance of the future regulatory system.

Transition to the new regulatory framework will require development of key implementation details that will impact the effectiveness of the new regulatory framework for safety;

- Enhancements to the management system in the areas of resource management, description of the internal safety culture, and organizational change management are needed;
- Regulations and guides should be developed for decommissioning and management of spent fuel. Regulations should be changed to require a quality assurance plan for the licensing of research and test reactors; and
- Enhancements to the licensing process are needed to clarify and strengthen the safety information in license amendments and assessment reports.

Background

The IRRS mission to the Republic of Korea was conducted from 10 to 22 July, mainly in Daejeon. The team also visited several nuclear installations, including a nuclear power plant, a research reactor and the country's emergency response centres.

The IRRS team reviewed the following regulatory areas: the government's responsibilities and functions in the nuclear safety regime; the responsibilities and functions of the regulatory body and its management system; the activities of the regulatory body including authorizations; review and assessment; inspection and enforcement processes; and the development of regulations and guides.

Team experts came from 14 different countries: Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Mexico, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and the United States.

About IRRS Missions

IRRS missions are designed to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of the national nuclear regulatory infrastructure of States, whilst recognizing the ultimate responsibility of each State to ensure safety in this area.

This is done through consideration of both regulatory, technical and policy issues, with comparisons against IAEA safety standards and, where appropriate, good practices elsewhere.

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