

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY ACTIVITIES IN DECOMMISSIONING

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been addressing the safety and technical issues of decommissioning for over 20 years, but their focus has been primarily on planning. Up to now, the activities have been on an ad hoc basis and sometimes, important issues have been missed. A new Action Plan on the Decommissioning of Nuclear Facilities has recently been approved by the Agency's board of Governors which will focus the Agency's efforts and ensure that our Member States' concerns are addressed. The new initiatives associated with this Action Plan will help ensure that decommissioning activities in the future are performed in a safe and coherent manner.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been preparing safety and technical documents concerning decommissioning since the mid-1980's. There have been over 30 documents prepared that provide safety requirements, guidance and supporting technical information. Many of these documents are over 10 years old and need updating. The main focus in the past has been on planning for decommissioning.

During the past five years, a set of Safety Standards have been prepared and issued to provide safety requirements and guidance to Member States. However, decommissioning was never a real priority with the Agency, but was something that had to be addressed. To illustrate this point, the first requirements documents on decommissioning were issued as part of a Safety Requirements [1] on predisposal management of radioactive waste. It was felt that decommissioning did not deserve its own document because it was just part of the normal waste management process. The focus was mostly on waste management.

The Agency has assisted Member States with the planning process for decommissioning. Most of these activities have been focused on nuclear power plants and research reactors. Now, support for the decommissioning of other types of facilities is being requested. The Agency is currently providing technical assistance to Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Philippines, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. This list of countries requesting assistance from the Agency continues to grow every year.

A recently published Safety Guide entitled "Application of the Concepts of Exclusion, Exemption and Clearance" (RS-G-1.7) [2] provides guidance to national authorities and operating organizations on the application of the concepts of exclusion, exemption and clearance as established in the Basic Safety Standards [3]. It provides specific values of activity concentrations for both radionuclides of natural origin and those of artificial origin that may be used for bulk amounts of material for the purposes of applying exemption. The document also provides guidance on the application of these values for clearance.