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THE NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY IDENTIFIES FUTURE CHALLENGES FACING NUCLEAR REGULATORS

Growing competition and deregulation in the electricity sector are changing the playing field and creating new challenges for nuclear regulators. The major challenge will be to ensure that economic pressures do not erode nuclear safety. In order to maintain regulatory effectiveness, they will have to adapt to an increasingly market-oriented environment and integrate new considerations into their working relationships with operators. Regulators will also have to respond to pressure for greater openness and more effective interface with the public, media and parliaments.

These are the main messages that the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities are addressing to the governments of its Member countries in *Future Nuclear Regulatory Challenges*, just published today.

The report identifies a number of issues which are likely to create future challenges for regulators. The report separates these into technical, socio-economic and political issues; organisational, management and human aspects; and international issues. Some of the issues have the potential to affect the majority of regulators and are therefore particularly well-suited to international co-operation.

Technical issues that may present significant new regulatory challenges in the future are mostly related to the ageing of nuclear plants, components and structures; analytical techniques and documentation; rules and standards; and technology. Other technical issues with potential regulatory impact include plant backfitting and plant life extension, maximising output from existing reactors, and decommissioning plants.

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Socio-economic and political issues which will require regulators' attention include deregulation of the electricity market, privatisation and restructuring of companies in the electricity supply sector, and staff reductions.

Organisational, managerial and human-resource issues that present significant future challenges include regulatory effectiveness, licensee responsibility and staff training.

International issues with potential regulatory impact concern the development of co-operation among safety authorities, including in those countries where regulatory organisations need to be strengthened.

The report concludes that over the next ten years, six major challenges could potentially affect the majority of nuclear regulators and warrant special attention. These are:

- coping with ageing nuclear plants;
- maintaining safety margins during more exacting operating modes;
- promoting safety culture;
- enhancing regulatory effectiveness;
- ensuring that operators fully assume their safety responsibilities;
- ensuring that staff are well-trained and that a critical mass of knowledge is preserved.

“FUTURE NUCLEAR REGULATORY CHALLENGES”

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