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INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP TO ENHANCE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY'S PREPAREDNESS FOR THE PASSAGE TO THE YEAR 2000 (Y2K)

Nuclear regulators and operators, government officials, consultants and software specialists from about twenty nations will meet in Ottawa from February 8 to 10, 1999, to review technical preparedness for addressing the potential impact of the "millennium bug" (Y2K) on the safe operation of nuclear facilities.

A three-day international workshop, organised by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), will provide for a global dialogue among the nuclear community on the management of this issue. The workshop will be hosted by Canada's national nuclear regulatory body, the Atomic Energy Control Board (AECB).

Y2K refers to the potential for problems that may be experienced by computers and related systems and equipment when the date changes from December 31, 1999, to January 1, 2000, which computers may read to be the year 1900. Y2K presents many challenges to government and industry world-wide, and the nuclear industry is no exception. Computers have been integrated into nearly all aspects of nuclear installations, and among the areas that could potentially be affected are reactor fuelling and maintenance schedules, control and monitoring systems, security and safety systems and other operations.

Nuclear regulators and operators have been addressing the Y2K issue in a consistent and comprehensive manner for several years, and installations are expected to be Y2K compliant by mid-year 1999. Nevertheless, the NEA workshop is viewed as an important step toward supporting the continued safe and reliable operation of nuclear facilities world-wide.

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Toward this end, the workshop will bring together experts from around the world to share information and knowledge. Workshop sessions will focus on regulatory and industry strategies on Y2K, the status of program implementation, corrective actions taken to date, lessons learned, and the status of contingency planning. The international and global implications of the Y2K issue will also be considered. By identifying actual problems encountered, their safety importance, and how they are being addressed, the workshop will provide participants with insights on where efforts may need to be concentrated. A report on lessons learned will be produced following the workshop.

Dr. Agnes J. Bishop, President of the Atomic Energy Control Board, will deliver the opening address on February 8. The AECB was asked to host the workshop in part because Canada has developed a unique expertise in assessing the safety and reliability of computerized Instrumentation and Control systems for nuclear power plants. Dr. Shirley A. Jackson, Chair of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, will be the guest speaker at a dinner on February 9.

The NEA is a semi-autonomous technical body within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Its objective is to contribute to the development of nuclear energy as a safe, environmentally acceptable and economical energy source by fostering co-operation among its 27 member countries from Europe, America and the Asia-Pacific region.

The workshop is an important element of the comprehensive action plan developed by the NEA Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities (CNRA) to help member countries deal with the Y2K issue. The CNRA is an international committee of senior representatives of national nuclear regulatory organisations, who meet at regular intervals to exchange information and experience. The CNRA has also established a network of national Y2K co-ordinators to facilitate the timely exchange of information on compliance testing and actions taken by member countries. Furthermore, an electronic "mail box" is being used to allow NEA countries to share up-to-date information on potential problems. The NEA has also established a direct link with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure that information is available to non-member countries.

An information briefing by senior conference officials will be held on Monday, February 8 at 10:15 a.m. (Ottawa time) in the Sussex Lounge, Government Conference Centre, 2 Rideau Street (Colonel By entrance), Ottawa. For information, contact Sunni Locatelli at the Canadian Atomic Energy Control Board, by telephone at 1 (613) 996 6860, by fax at 1 (613) 992 2915, or by e-mail at locatelli.s@atomcon.gc.ca.

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