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## **NUCLEAR INDUSTRY STRENGTHENS PREPAREDNESS FOR THE PASSAGE TO THE YEAR 2000 (Y2K)**

An international technical workshop held in Ottawa (Canada), from 8 to 10 February 1999, has concluded that further development of contingency plans, both nationally and internationally, is necessary to deal with the issues associated with the potential impact of the “millennium bug” (Y2K) on the safe operation of nuclear facilities.

The workshop was organised by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and was hosted by Canada’s national nuclear regulatory body, the Atomic Energy Control Board (AECB). Over 80 participants from some 20 countries provided input to the discussions. Participation by several Eastern European countries added valuable information on the status of Y2K preparedness in these countries. The meeting, which included nuclear regulators and operators, government officials and software specialists, was viewed as an important step toward supporting the continued safe and reliable operation of nuclear facilities world-wide.

After reviewing the status of Y2K programmes, consensus was reached among the participants that Y2K issues have been addressed in a consistent and comprehensive manner for several years, and that installations are expected to be Y2K compliant by mid-year 1999. This will be made easier by the fact that the methodologies being used (e.g. inventory of components, assessment and analysis, test and verification, etc.) are fairly common among all countries. However, nuclear operators and regulators must continue to be vigilant to ensure confidence in Y2K readiness. In particular, experts identified the need to move contingency planning to the forefront of the Y2K strategies being implemented in the various countries. The major focus is on external risks to the electrical grid, communication systems and other related concerns.

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News Media Contact: Jacques de la Ferté - Tel. 33 (0)1 4524 1010 - Fax 33 (0)1 4524 1110  
e-mail: [news.contact@nea.fr](mailto:news.contact@nea.fr) - web site:<http://www.nea.fr>

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It was announced during the meeting that, at the initiative of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (U.S. NRC), the NEA Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities (CNRA) will organise an international exercise to assist in world-wide contingency planning. This exercise would provide a unique opportunity to co-ordinate planning, communication and response systems relevant to nuclear power plants.

This workshop forms an important element of the comprehensive action plan developed by the 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.

The NEA is a semi-autonomous technical body within the OECD. 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.