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THE NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY COMPLETES AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF THE RUSSIAN MINATOM NUCLEAR SAFETY RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN

The OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) has today released a report by an international review group providing an independent expert assessment of the nuclear safety research strategic Plan of Russia. The review was conducted at the request of the Russian International Nuclear Safety Center (RINSC) and the US International Nuclear Safety Center (USINSC).

The report concludes that this Plan represents major progress toward a comprehensive and coherent nuclear safety research programme for Russian nuclear power plants (NPP). According to the report, this Plan contains elements which, if implemented, will lead to an improvement in the safety levels of Russian reactors. The report of the NEA Review Group was officially transmitted to Minatom at the end of February 1999.

However, the Plan as reviewed, was found to still lack an overall strategy identifying individual objectives and priorities as well as an implementation process. Both the review group and the Russian experts included in the team, note that this draft Plan is only a first step toward the development of an overall up-to-date programme for safety research. Improvements will be needed, notably to optimise available resources and to address the principal safety issues in a balanced way.

The review group, chaired by the NEA, was composed of senior experts from Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, as well as from the RINSC and the USINSC.

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This review follows last year's report by the NEA entitled *Safety Research Needs for Russian-Designed Reactors*. This report included a recommendation regarding the preparation of a Safety Research Strategic Plan for Russia to set goals, define products required of safety research, describe how and when the work would be implemented, and establish research priorities based on the needs of the users of safety research results.

175 specific programmes of research are identified in the Strategic Plan, 83 of which are considered by Minatom of higher priority. The areas of research covered by the Plan are the following: integrity of piping and equipment; integrity of building structures; reactor dynamics and safety; severe accident and mitigation; radiation thermal mechanics of core components; probabilistic safety analysis; improvement of the concept of safety assurance of NPP; development of the system of safety regulations and standards; severe accident management; operator training and support systems. The NEA report also concludes that the Plan's scope should be expanded to include some important NPP-safety research areas that are omitted or are given only minor weight.

As to particular priorities, the review group believes that the most important objective of the Plan ought to be to achieve as many short-term improvements in the safety of the existing operating power reactors as feasible. In this connection, the issue is not simply one of doing the needed research, but of effective and rapid application of the results at the operating plants.

In conclusion, the NEA Review Group emphasises that the Plan is an excellent starting point which can, with further enhancements, provide what Russian NPP safety truly requires: a comprehensive, strategic, effective safety-research Plan that can take full advantage of the strong and broad technical capabilities available in Russia. Furthermore, this review could increase international support for, and further the awareness of, nuclear safety research in Russia, on both the political and the technical level.

RUSSIAN MINATOM NUCLEAR SAFETY RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN - An international Review is available free on request from the Publications Office of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, Le Seine St Germain, 12 boulevard des Iles, 92130 Issy-les-Moulineaux, France.