UNSCEAR's activities and issues

This information paper has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) for the 45th meeting of the IAEA Radiation Safety Standards Committee (21–23 November 2018). It is based on the Committee’s 65th Report to the General Assembly, which was presented to the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 6 November 2018.

UNSCEAR’S SIXTY FIFTH SESSION

The Committee had elected Hans Vanmarcke (Belgium) as Chair; Peter Jacob (Germany), Patsy Thompson (Canada) and Michael Waligórski (Poland) as Vice-Chairs; and Gillian Hirth (Australia) as Rapporteur for its 65th session in Vienna (11–14 June 2018). The Committee discussed the following session documents indented as scientific annexes for future reports to the General Assembly:

1) Selected evaluations of health effects and risk inference from radiation exposure;
2) Lung cancer from exposure to radon and to penetrating radiation;
3) Evaluation of medical exposures to ionizing radiation;
4) Evaluation of occupational exposures to ionizing radiation; and
5) Biological mechanisms influencing health effects from low-dose radiation exposure.

The first two documents are intended to be discussed at the Committee’s 66th session with a view for approval and publication as scientific annexes of the UNSCEAR 2019 Report.

UNSCEAR’S FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Committee discussed plans for new projects on: (a) Second primary cancers after radiotherapy, (b) Epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer, and (c) Updating its 2013 UNSCEAR Report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the 2011 Fukushima accident. The Committee agreed the project plan for the updating of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report with the intention to produce a new Report by the tenth anniversary of the accident in 2021. Further, the Committee established an ad hoc working group to assist in developing the Committee’s future programme of work on the effects of radiation exposure and the biological mechanisms for the period (2020–2024).

UNSCEAR’S SIXTY SIXTH SESSION

The Committee will elect new officers to consist its Bureau for the 66th and 67th sessions at the opening of the its 66th session, which will be hold from 10–14 June 2019 in Vienna.

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1 The United Nations General Assembly established the Scientific Committee in 1955 to assess and report levels and effects of exposure to ionizing radiation. The Assembly designated 27 countries to provide scientists as members of this high-level Committee. The Committee’s programme of work is approved by the Assembly, and is in a process of transition from extending over a 4–5 year period to a rolling portfolio of projects. The secretariat, which is provided through arrangements with the United Nations Environment Programme, collates data from Member States and other international organizations, and engages specialists to analyze information, study relevant scientific literature and produce scientific reviews for scrutiny at the Committee’s annual sessions. The Committee also reports its findings annually to the General Assembly, which provides unique access to the highest level of decision-making in the UN system.

2 https://undocs.org/A/73/46.

UNSCEAR’S OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Committee welcomed the timely launch of the UNSCEAR 2017 Report and the White Paper on the evaluation of data on thyroid cancer in regions affected by the Chernobyl accident. The Committee also welcomed the online publication of the United Nations Environment Programme updated booklet entitled “Radiation: effects and sources”, which was intended as a guide for the public. The UNEP booklet had appeared in the six official languages of the United Nations and in five more languages. Furthermore, the Committee requested its secretariat to update the Public Information and Outreach Strategy for (2019–2024), which will include outreach work in Japan after the update of the Committee’s 2013 Report on the Fukushima-Daiichi accident.

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