UNSCEAR Activities – Update

This information paper has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)\(^1\) for the 47\(^{th}\) meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency Waste Safety Standards Committee (18–20 June 2019). It is based on the Committee’s draft annual report to the United Nations General Assembly\(^2\) and the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2018\(^3\), which was discussed at the its 66\(^{th}\) UNSCEAR session (10–14 June 2019).

Since the last WASSC meeting, the new Secretary (Ms Borislava Batandjieva-Metcalf) was appointed and commenced work in April 2019, and the 66\(^{th}\) Committee session took place. A summary of the 66\(^{th}\) session’s outcomes is presented below.

UNSCEAR’S SIXTY SIXTH SESSION

The Committee held its 66\(^{th}\) annual session in Vienna (10–14 June 2019) and attended by 148 participants from 25 Member States, 8 international organizations and 4 observer countries. A new Bureau was elected: Ms Gillian Hirth (Australia) served as Chair; Ms Jing Chen (Canada), Ms Anna Friedl (Germany) and Ms Jin Kyung Lee (Republic of Korea) as Vice-Chairs; and Mr Ingemar Lund (Sweden) as Rapporteur.

The Committee approved two documents as scientific annexes for publication underpinning findings that will be reported to the UN General Assembly this year, namely:

A. Evaluations of selected health effects and the inference of risk due to radiation exposure; and

B. Lung cancer from exposure to radon.

Further, the Committee discussed the following documents intended to be approved at the Committee’s 67\(^{th}\) session and published as scientific annexes of the UNSCEAR 2020 Report:

1) Evaluation of medical exposure to ionizing radiation;

2) Evaluation of occupational exposure to ionizing radiation;

3) Biological mechanisms relevant for the inference of cancer risks from low-dose radiation; and

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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 analyse 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 (www.unscear.org)

\(^{2}\) The Committee’s report to the United Nations General Assembly will be presented to the Fourth Committee in the fourth quarter of 2019.

4) Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station: implications of information published since the 2013 UNSCEAR report.

The secretariat is presently setting up expert groups for two new projects endorsed by the Committee to commence in the third quarter of 2019:

1) Second Primary Cancer after radiotherapy; and
2) Epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer.

UNSCEAR’S FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Committee considered its future Programme of Work for the 2020–2024 period and agreed that very high priority should be given to start a study on diseases of the circulatory system and exposure to ionizing radiation. The Committee discussed several other topics, classified as high priority by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Effects and Mechanisms. The Committee agreed that these to be considered in the future, subject to completion of ongoing projects and further literature reviews.

The Committee also agreed that in order to implement its current and future Programme of Work, it is important, to extend the Ad Hoc Working Group on Effects and Mechanisms for one more year, and to establish a second Ad Hoc Working Group on Sources and Exposure. Each ad hoc working group will be led by a Vice-Chair of the Committee and will report to the Bureau.

The Committee asked the secretariat to establish an expert group on public exposure that will develop a project proposal for consideration at the 67th session. Regarding future assessment of public exposure from discharges, the International Atomic Energy Agency and UN Environment (UNEP) agreed in principle that UNEP takes over the database. Together with the secretariat the most appropriate means will be assessed in order to update and use the IAEA’s DIRATA database for the Committee’s planned evaluation of public exposure to ionizing radiation.

UNSCEAR’S OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Committee endorsed the secretariat’s proposal for a new strategy on public information and outreach activities for the 2020–2024 period. This includes a detailed implementation plan, which complements the planned Secretariat’s outreach activities on the update of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, planed for approval at the 67th session of the Committee in 2020.

The main elements of the Public Information and Outreach Strategy are:

- Further enhance the UNSCEAR public website;
- Further develop appropriate communications material;
- Further enhance engagement with the news media; and
- Further enhance engagement with other stakeholders.
The Committee welcomed the online publication of the updated UNEP booklet entitled “Radiation: Effects and Sources” (which is intended as information for the public)\(^5\) in all the official languages of the United Nations, and in five other languages as well. The Committee encouraged the secretariat to further promote this work. Further, a press release was launched on the occasion of the 66\(^{th}\) session.\(^6\)

The next 67\(^{th}\) session of the Committee is scheduled for 13-17 July 2020 in Vienna.

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