

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OPERATIONAL SAFETY PERFORMANCE IN
NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS

by

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Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to Vienna and welcome to this International Conference on Operational Safety Performance in Nuclear Installations. Over 150 delegates have registered for the conference, representing not only nuclear power plant operators and regulators, but research reactor and fuel cycle facilities as well. I am encouraged to see such a global audience in attendance.

In our work at the Agency, we frequently find that challenges faced by one sector of the nuclear industry are in fact challenges faced in other parts as well. We have also noticed that one sector may have already faced and successfully met a challenge that another sector is still facing. By meeting here together and participating in a full and open manner, perhaps you will get some insights that will help you move forward. Of course, there are some global challenges that we all face and by working together, perhaps we can come up with solutions that might allude us individually.

Operational safety is one of the most challenging areas that my department deals with. In addition to having to consider sound engineering and technology principles, you must take into account the human and organizational factors that can either contribute to, or detract from, safety. There are also economic, political and social pressures that must be taken into account.

This is a very appropriate time for us to come together to discuss operational safety performance. Almost twenty years ago, the Chernobyl accident sent the clear message that nuclear safety is a global issue and international cooperation is vitally important. Since that fateful day in 1986, many improvements have been made and we can honestly point to a substantially improved nuclear safety situation throughout the world. The way the nuclear industry has coped with severe natural disaster conditions around the world is a testament to the level of safety. Tsunamis, floods, hurricanes and earthquakes have affected many parts of the world and nuclear installations everywhere responded admirably. The design and operational features ensured that the extreme natural conditions would not jeopardize safety. Many of these facilities returned to normal operations very quickly once the extreme situation had passed, providing necessary and much needed infrastructure.

However, there is a very real possibility that we will become complacent with our high level of performance. Every quality management expert will tell you that you need to continuously improve just to maintain your current position. In fact, the margin for further safety improvement is smaller than in the past, and it is more of a challenge to find and implement this continuous improvement. Without sustained safety improvement effort, a decline will occur. Personally, I do not want to believe that the decline has started, but there are already some early warning signs that give me cause for concern. We continue to see recurrent events. We continue to see some of the same recommendations being made over and over again. We continue to see operating organizations and regulatory bodies struggling with issues that others have solved. At WANO's recent biannual meeting, Mr. Cavanaugh, WANO chairman articulated his concern that not all senior executives are taking safety activities seriously enough. I share this concern and believe we need strong safety leadership, effective safety management and sustained safety culture, especially for those nuclear plants facing extended operations. The challenge is immense because of the deep-rooted human and organizational nature and complex man-machine interface.

As you know, last April, the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety met in Vienna for the 3rd review meeting. I'd like to summarize some of the key findings from the review meeting. All Contracting Parties identified the fundamental need for openness and transparency in the nuclear industry. There was also special emphasis put on the need for leadership in nuclear safety from both regulators and operators and about the need to continue and improve communication between regulators and operators. Safety management received a great deal of attention, and is particularly important for operational safety. Probabilistic Safety Assessment is now a mainstream tool in most countries, although every Contracting Party stressed that it is not used in isolation. More and more countries are now requiring periodic safety reviews as part of their regulatory regimes. Knowledge management continues to be important as experienced staff retire and as facilities move into extended operation. The meeting also noted the important role that peer reviews, such as those offered by the IAEA and WANO, have in maintaining and improving operational safety. Finally, the meeting reinforced the fact that the IAEA safety standards have matured and now offer a comprehensive suite of nuclear safety standards that embodies good practices and a reference point to the high level of safety required for all nuclear activities.

The nuclear renaissance that everyone is talking about and is showing signs of now being underway will only be possible if the nuclear industry continues to subscribe to and achieve the highest levels of safety. There is no other industry in the world where the fate of one is in the hands of the others. A major accident at any NPP anywhere in the world could bring an immediate end to the euphoria that exists in many countries.

With all of this as a backdrop, we organized this conference so that we can continue to improve. Throughout this conference, I would like you to keep the following questions in mind during your deliberations:

1. What are the links between nuclear safety management, including regulatory activities, and the global regime of continuously improving operational safety?

2. What actions can the nuclear industry, the safety authorities and the international nuclear community take to become more proactive and to respond to early symptoms, precursors or any deviation from normal operating conditions that would help avoid events in the first place?
3. What actions can we take to close gaps between current knowledge and human and organizational behaviours that will improve operational safety?
4. What actions can be identified to address the issues relating to complacency? What actions can be taken regarding a questioning and learning attitude as well as openness and transparency?
5. How can the international nuclear community enhance sharing experiences and lessons learned regarding operating nuclear installations and how can we better reflect these lessons in the design and operation of new and evolutionary plants.

As we think about these questions, let's keep in mind that we already have a number of legal instruments and practical tools in place for improving safety, such as the Convention on Nuclear Safety, the Code of Conduct on the Safety of Research Reactors, the IAEA Safety Standards and the many Agency safety services. Where possible, our recommendations should build upon these, rather than creating parallel or additional arrangements.

The issues and recommendations from this conference will be documented and provided to your governments for their elaboration and implementation and to assist them prepare for upcoming meetings associated with the safety of nuclear installations. Here in the Agency, closely working with our Member States, we will use the conference results to adjust our programmes.

I wish all of you a good and productive conference.

Thank you.