

THE GLOBAL WASTE SAFETY REGIME - Chairperson K. Higashi, (Japan)

In the opening presentation, the role of the IAEA in relation to the safety of radioactive waste disposal was described. This encompasses the administration of the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management (the Joint Convention), the development of international safety standards, and the provision of assistance in the use and application of the standards. It was noted that the principal document of the waste safety standards provided the technical basis for the Joint Convention. The objective of Joint Convention is to ensure a high level of safety worldwide in the management of radioactive waste. The process for achieving this objective involves the preparation, by Contracting Parties to the Convention, of national reports and the review of the reports at the periodic review meetings. The presentation provided an encouraging view of the progress being made towards global waste safety e.g. the recent agreement on international safety standards on geological disposal, the appreciable progress in geological disposal projects in several countries (USA, Finland, Sweden and France), and the public approval for a disposal facility at Kincardine (Canada).

The second presentation covered the preparation and peer review of the national reports for the Joint Convention and summarized the recommendations of the first review meeting held in 2003. Key factors to enhance the efficiency of the Joint Convention process include having a wider membership and improved national reports. It was concluded that the Joint Convention can play a major role in improving waste safety worldwide. In this connection, a recommendation from the first review meeting that countries should each develop and implement integrated waste management and decommissioning plans was considered to be very important and as reflecting the 'spirit of the convention'.

A presentation on the waste safety standards covered the history and hierarchy of the standards, the process for their development and the current status of documents in preparation. Specific mention was made of the Safety Requirements on the Geological Disposal of Radioactive Waste which was approved by the IAEA Board of Governors in September 2005. An IAEA plan to encourage the effective use and application of the standards in IAEA Member States was also emphasized.

A summary and review of ten contributed papers from nine countries was presented. These papers covered a wide range of topics pertaining to the global waste safety regime, e.g., experience in the preparation and peer review of national reports for the Joint Convention, the import and export of spent nuclear fuel and the products of its reprocessing, international and regional cooperative efforts on waste safety, national regulations and licensing procedures for

radioactive waste management, especially spent radiation sources, and the safety management system for geological disposal projects taking account of their long-term nature.

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion on three major themes: a) enhancing participation in the Joint Convention, b) effective use of the waste safety standards globally, and c) the importance of international cooperation in the field of radioactive waste management. The major points from the panel discussion are summarized here.

The discussion on the Joint Convention initially focused on the likely reasons for the slow growth in the membership of contracting parties. Some of the reasons identified are: 1) the low priority accorded to this by the Member States; 2) the very elaborate requirements for the preparation of national reports; 3) the requirement for the presentation of national reports at the review meetings; and 4) the cost of participation. It is noted that several major nuclear countries are expected to join the Joint Convention soon. The measures to encourage more Member States to join were discussed and the following suggestions were made:

- to provide advice to potential contracting parties on the preparation of national reports and on dealing with the follow-up requirements; (It was noted that a 'tool kit' to assist in this matter is available on the US DOE website and in a guidance document issued by the IAEA.)
- to simplify requirements in relation to national reports for review meetings; and
- to convince countries, not already contracting parties, of the benefits of joining the Joint Convention. (It should be seen as a learning process in the improvement of waste safety at national and global levels. Both the IAEA secretariat and the existing contracting parties have an important role to play in this area to generate a better understanding of the various aspects of the Joint Convention.)

In connection with the effective use of the waste safety standards, it was noted that an IAEA survey, with a response from 23 countries, indicated that 70% use the standards either as reference documents or for formulating their own national standards. In order to obtain a more comprehensive feedback, other Member States were also requested to respond to the questionnaire sent by the IAEA. The standards can be used in the context of the Joint Convention as an aid in the preparation and review of national reports.

The panel members and participants emphasized the importance of regional and international cooperation in sharing information and experience in the field of radioactive waste management. In this context, the proposal by Japan for the extension of the Asian Nuclear Safety Network (ANSN) to the field of radioactive waste disposal was welcomed.

