There are a number of sites in Iraq which have been used for nuclear activities and which contain potentially significant amounts of radioactive material. Many of these sites suffered substantial physical damage during the Gulf Wars and several have been subject to looting of materials and equipment as a consequence of the challenging security situation in the country. All of these sites have some degree of contamination and require decommissioning and remediation in order to ensure radiological safety.

In December 2004, the Government of Iraq requested IAEA assistance to determine the effort needed to implement this work and to set up plans and programmes for its delivery.

The IAEA is coordinating a programme of international support for this decommissioning programme in order to ensure that best international experience and practice is brought to bear on this difficult challenge. Many governments and supporting national organizations are providing technical expertise, supporting visits to their nuclear sites and facilities and providing training placements for Iraqi staff in order to help build decommissioning and regulatory capabilities.

Many of the nuclear facilities on the Al-Tuwaitha site were originally provided with support from France, Italy and the former Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s. In the turmoil within Iraq over the last decade or more, most of the records, plans and documentation for these facilities have been lost or destroyed. France, Italy and the Russian Federation have agreed to examine their historical records and make available information relevant to the decommissioning activity.
France and Germany have hosted visits to their decommissioning and waste management facilities in order to assist Iraqi experts to develop their waste management strategy for the materials arising from the decommissioning programme. Ukraine is supporting the radiological assessment of characterization samples through a programme based at its International Radiocology Laboratory. A training programme on the characterization of contaminated facilities is also being supported. Jordan has hosted several meetings between representatives of Germany, Iraq, the United States of America and the IAEA to discuss challenges to the project.

The USA is providing extensive support for this programme, both through IAEA coordinated activity and directly through a bilateral programme with Iraq. The Department of State provides a national focus for this activity. There is extensive input from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which is aiding the development of the law and regulations, together with training placements for Iraqi regulatory staff. Sandia Laboratories and Texas Technical University provide expertise in decommissioning, characterization, waste management and health surveillance.

Other support for the project comes from Canada, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom which are providing relevant expertise, training and historical knowledge.

The objectives of the project aim to:

- Support the development of a new nuclear law and implementing regulations, together with the formation of a new regulatory body building from the experience of the existing regulators, thereby ensuring a proper legal basis for effective regulatory scrutiny and control of the decommissioning programme and continue assistance as Iraq drafts and passes its own nuclear law (building upon work done previously in the project).
- Review ongoing and proposed decommissioning activities and suggest areas where further work is required, based on an assessment of the work done in the past in accordance with IAEA safety standards and guidance, and bearing in mind the ongoing work and projects (including plans to construct, licence and operate near surface radioactive waste disposal facilities).
- Review proposed waste disposal activities and suggest areas where further work is required in accordance with IAEA safety standards and guidance (including plans to construct, licence and operate near surface radioactive waste disposal facilities).
- Assist with the Government of Iraq’s desire to establish a certified radioanalytical laboratory with trained personnel and appropriate operating procedures.
- Review procurement requests and provide suggestions ensuring a radioanalytical laboratory that meets regulatory requirements.
- Assist in developing a skilled workforce and a sustainable infrastructure that fully supports the mission and goals of the concerned Iraqi organizations, including building the capacity and experience of Iraqi personnel and organizations in the field of nuclear decommissioning, waste management, radiation protection and environmental protection.
- Assist with the establishment of mechanisms for Iraq to ‘reach out’ to, and cooperate with, other Member States on decommissioning, waste management, radiation protection and environmental protection activities.

The expected outcome is to strengthen the national capacity for environmental protection against radiological hazards through the successful decommissioning and remediation of contaminated facilities and sites.

For further Information:
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See: http://www-ns.iaea.org/projects/iraq/default.asp?id=8&il=66
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