

ever undertaken by the agency. . . . The benefits will be felt by member states for decades to come.”

The first new building in the modernization effort at Seibersdorf, the Insect Pest Control Laboratory, was inaugurated on September 25.

Regulators: Assessing safety culture, SMRs

A pilot project on the licensing of small modular reactors (SMR) and a new safety culture self-assessment methodology for regulators were highlighted at the Regulatory Cooperation Forum on September 22, the last day of the IAEA General Conference.

With four SMRs in three countries already under construction and many others in the planning phase, regulators want to make sure that their licensing processes enable the eventual timely and well-informed licensing of this new technology, according to Stewart Magruder, an IAEA senior nuclear safety officer who spoke at the forum.

SMRs, defined by the IAEA as reactors with an output of less than 300 MWe, will have shorter construction times and are expected to be cost-competitive to build. “Though smaller, the safety and security measures for this next generation of nuclear power reactors can be no less stringent [than] the obligations that present-day reactors are subject to,” Magruder said.

The IAEA recently supported a pilot project to identify, understand, and address key regulatory issues specific to SMRs. The participating regulators discussed the importance of having safety mechanisms that have a number of consecutive and independent levels of protection for SMRs. A number of SMR designers have proposed alternate ways to address these issues in their designs.

The SMR pilot project provided an opportunity to discuss, among other things, the use of a graded approach to regulation in response to vendors’ proposals to customize regulatory requirements, Magruder noted.

The participants also exchanged information on practices and strategies with regard to emergency planning zones for SMRs. Based on the unique characteristics of SMRs, such as their inherent safety features and the slower progression of accidents, smaller zones are being proposed by SMR vendors. Existing strategies and practices are being assessed by the SMR Regulatory Forum members to develop a common approach to the issue.

“The IAEA intends to continue working closely with regulators on approaches to safety and licensing ahead of potential SMR deployment worldwide,” Magruder said. This will include an emphasis on

safety culture that needs to permeate SMR licensing as well, and the new IAEA safety culture assessment methodology for regulators will be essential in that respect, he added.

This new safety culture self-assessment methodology for regulators, which is based on IAEA safety standards, provides an opportunity for regulatory bodies to evaluate potential weaknesses in the underlying safety culture in their organizations as a first step to addressing them. It is based on a similar IAEA methodology used by nuclear facility operators. According to the agency, this new methodology will help regulators carry out safety and licensing

reviews and ultimately strengthen safety at nuclear installations they regulate.

During a presentation on this subject, various mechanisms to improve safety-culture assessment were addressed. “Collection of data through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, document reviews, and focus groups forms an initial phase of the assessment process,” explained Gabriel Soare, a nuclear safety officer at the IAEA. The most important, however, is the analysis of the data collected.

The forum has 29 members, including the IAEA, the European Commission, and the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency.

Section continued

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