

Safety of Civilian Nuclear Reactors

1) Principles of nuclear safety, including support for early entry into force of the Convention on Nuclear Safety

Although essentially a national responsibility, in light of the consequences of a major nuclear disaster, all states have a legitimate concern that nuclear power is managed safely everywhere. Over the years, an expanding international infrastructure and international consensus focused on nuclear safety has developed. It is based on an array of binding legal instruments, internationally recognized safety principles, expert review and advisory services and international assistance. This includes an obligation to bring existing reactors that do not meet today's safety requirements to an acceptable level of safety or cease operation.

A general understanding has developed that nuclear safety is the prime responsibility of nuclear operators within a legally binding national regulatory framework operating independently with adequate technical support. The operator and the regulator can only exercise their responsibilities in an appropriate economic and legal environment where they have access to a stable source of revenue. (See energy sector strategies below.)

The G-7 strategy to help improve nuclear safety of the Soviet-designed reactors of Central and Eastern Europe countries and the Newly Independent States was developed at the Munich Summit in 1992 and was complemented by decisions taken at subsequent Summits. There have been a number of initiatives undertaken since then for nuclear safety improvements and for the strengthening of regulatory regimes. These include the establishment of the Nuclear Safety Account managed by the EBRD, the G-24 coordinating mechanism, the European Union PHARE and TACIS programmes, the Euratom loan facility, coordinated support from the international financial institutions for energy sector reform, and bilateral cooperation projects. In addition, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States have taken actions themselves to improve safety and strengthen their regulatory bodies.

The Moscow Nuclear Summit highlights progress to date and reinforces the importance of partnership among the participants of the Summit in addressing safety concerns.

A major accomplishment in the nuclear safety area was the adoption in June 1994 of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. As of March 1996, it has been signed by 62 countries and ratified or accepted by sixteen, twelve of which have nuclear installations. Ratification by twenty-two States -- seventeen with nuclear installations -- is necessary for entry into force.