

Safety

Over the year, the IAEA continued to make good progress on many nuclear safety initiatives. In 1994, the Nuclear Safety Convention was adopted and, in recognition of Canada's efforts, the President of the Atomic Energy Control Board, Dr. Agnes Bishop, was invited to be the first to sign it. Canada ratified the Convention on December 12, 1995, and it entered into force on October 24, 1996. Implementation of the Convention will make an important contribution to strengthening worldwide nuclear safety culture. Signatories to the Convention, including Canada, are preparing for the first meeting of parties to the Convention to be held in Vienna in April 1999. Canadian nuclear stakeholders are contributing to the preparation of the National Report (as all signatories are required to do). This will be submitted to the IAEA secretariat, which will arrange for international peer review as agreed under the Convention.

The IAEA Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management, which establishes internationally accepted safety norms, was adopted by member states in September 1997. Canada played a prominent role in negotiating the Convention and fully supports the final text. Approval to sign the Convention, and to bring it into force for Canada, is being sought and is expected in 1998.

Other multilateral safety issues addressed by IDN officials over the year included the implementation of projects to improve the safety of nuclear reactors in Eastern Europe (including the Chernobyl nuclear power plant under direction of the G7 Nuclear Safety Working Group, with funding through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development – EBRD); the Canadian response to radioactive contamination in the Arctic from past military and civilian operations of the former Soviet Union; and national and international activities related to the Canadian federal nuclear emergency plan.

In April 1996, Prime Minister Chrétien announced at the Moscow Nuclear Safety and Security Summit that Canada agreed, in principle, to consider the CANDU MOX option. Under the proposal, surplus weapons-grade plutonium would be used as fuel by Ontario Hydro in CANDU nuclear reactors. This non-proliferation initiative is designed to ensure that the remaining amount of plutonium in the spent fuel would be rendered inaccessible for weapons purposes. Additional feasibility studies and tests on using MOX fuel in CANDU reactors were conducted. The United States and the Russian Federation have not yet decided on whether they wish to proceed with the CANDU MOX option. Before proceeding, the proposal would have to satisfy all federal and provincial licensing, environmental, health and safety requirements.