April 2021

Nuclear safety management in France in the context related to Covid-19

April 2021 update

This document, prepared for the 49th meeting of the IAEA Commission on Safety Standards, provides an update on the situation in France since November 2020.

National context

The ban on population movement (lockdown) put in place at the end of October ended on 15 December. A new nationwide lockdown, including the closure of schools and educational institutions, has been in place since 6 April for a period of one month.

Situation in nuclear installations

On the whole, nuclear installations are operating normally. This is notably the case for nuclear power plants and fuel cycle facilities.

Organisation of the ASN and consequences for the conduct of its missions

ASN continues a five-day teleworking regime. Activities that require it are carried out in person. This is particularly the case for on call handovers, crisis exercises, on-site inspections and certain training modules.

Regulations and licensing

In general, regulatory and licensing activities are continuing in a normal manner.

Oversight

The parliamentary hearings in the spring of 2020 confirmed that the on-site inspection is seen by parliamentarians as an essential public service mission. It is therefore requested to continue the programme at the planned pace.

In practice, the documentary verification parts of inspections are carried out remotely and on-site travel is largely limited to field inspection.

On site, the wearing of masks, the application of barrier gestures and compliance with the measures put in place by the operator are de rigueur.

Particular attention is paid to the medical sector. Inspectors are asked to ensure that both on-site and remote inspections do not disrupt the activities of this sector, which is under stress due to the health crisis.

Emergency

Crisis organisation remains fully operational and able to be activated at any time.

Public information

Relations with the press have continued normally.

Dematerialised resources now constitute an additional media relations tool whose deployment has been accelerated by the crisis.

International relations

Most international meetings now take place remotely.

Work within the various international frameworks continues in a more or less degraded mode.

Bilateral relations are more impacted by the situation since face-to-face meetings (high-level meetings, technical meetings, cross inspections, etc.) are their primary vector.

Consequences on the ASN's strategy

The Covid-19 crisis will have lasting consequences in the short and medium terms. It will take time to have a complete and definitive feedback.

ASN is currently carrying out a two-level reflection, at the operational level for the short term, and at the strategic level for the medium and long terms. Thus, ASN has taken into account preliminary feedback from the health crisis in its operational orientation plan for 2021. Subjects such as remote management, maintaining social ties and internal culture through extended teleworking, the use of new IT and communication tools and changes in inspection practices have been taken into account.

In addition, reflection at the strategic level will be integrated into the ASN's next multi-year strategic plan. Among the key topics that will be explored in greater depth are the strengthening of confidence in the regulator and experts, the development of better knowledge and awareness of risks, the importance of developing risk prevention measures, the regular sharing of feedback, the establishment of links with local relays trusted by the public, the setting up of regular emergency drills involving the public, the early involvement of the national education system, the involvement of the public and local representatives in crisis management. International exchanges will enrich this reflection.