

## **Uranium legacy sites in Kyrgyzstan: challenges and solutions**

*Ms. Gulnura Abasova, Tailings Management Agency under the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) of Kyrgyz Republic*

There are 286 million tons of uranium mill tailings and other highly toxic waste contained in more than 90 known locations in Kyrgyzstan. The state of the majority of the tailings impoundments has seriously deteriorated such that they no longer meet current safety standards and environmental safety cannot be ensured in the long run.

Kyrgyzstan is also faced with regional risks associated with uranium tailings. A number of large areas of uranium tailings, both in Kyrgyzstan and in other countries in the region, are located in close proximity to rivers and water bodies making up the water basin of Central Asia. In case of possible accidents at the tailings sites, regional rivers could be polluted by highly toxic waste causing large-scale environmental and humanitarian disasters. This could then result in negative and long-term impacts on life and health of millions of people as well as socio-economic development in several countries of Central Asia.

In order to address this urgent challenge, in recent years Central Asian states have been working on several joint projects aimed at reducing radiological and environmental risks conditions in locations of radioactive waste. Solutions to address this ongoing situation should be well coordinated and effective, both on the regional level, and in partnership with international organizations and financial institutions. The Kyrgyz Republic has been working hard in this direction for a long time now.

The IAEA, the European Union, the Russian Federation, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, United Nations Development Programme in Kyrgyz Republic, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Programme office in Bishkek and other partners make a special contribution for practical support and effective assistance in the implementation of projects. In particular, international partners supported studies to assess environmental impact in our region and establish effective financing mechanism for funds accumulation - the Environmental Remediation Account for Central Asia (ERA). A project management team consisting of agency employees and international consultants was created within the Tailings Management Agency under the MES of Kyrgyz Republic to implement remediation projects using ERA funds.

Furthermore, the Strategic Master Plan for environmental remediation of uranium legacy sites in Central Asia has been developed in close cooperation with the IAEA. This document is the roadmap for sustainable remediation of these sites.