

Watchdogs urge completion of post-Fukushima checks

June 8 2011



A picture taken in May 2011 in Pierrelatte, southern France, shows a windmill pictured near the cooling towers of Tricastin nuclear power plant. Nuclear regulatory agencies called on Wednesday for national watchdogs to complete post-Fukushima checks but stressed plant operators should not escape their "prime responsibility" for reactor safety.

Nuclear regulatory agencies called on Wednesday for national watchdogs to complete post-Fukushima checks but stressed plant operators should not escape their "prime responsibility" for reactor safety.

In a statement issued after talks in Paris, regulatory authorities from the OECD club and Brazil, India, Romania, South Africa and Ukraine vowed to take the lessons of the March 11 accident to heart.

"There have been excellent discussions today on 'what we are learning'

and 'what actions we are taking'," said a statement by the OECD's Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA).

It noted that countries had carried out or were preparing safety reviews of nuclear plants in the light of the accident and urged others to follow suit "as soon as possible."

The statement spelt out a range of priorities for vetting plant design and ensuring sound management after an accident.

They included "extreme external natural events and resilience to external shocks," as well as backup systems, emergency response, management capabilities and crisis communication.

The talks followed a meeting on Tuesday among policymakers from 33 countries.

The conclusions will be put to a meeting in Vienna of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from June 20-24, seen as a springboard for new international guidelines and procedures for [nuclear safety](#).

The Vienna meeting is likely to focus on the question of a tougher role for the IAEA and the powers of external inspectors to scrutinise nuclear safety and publish their findings.

Wednesday's meeting "stressed that the prime responsibility for nuclear safety rests with licensed operators," the statement said.

Participants, it added, welcomed efforts to improve safety through enhanced peer reviews, transparency and international cooperation among operators.

Andre-Claude Lacoste, head of France's Nuclear Safety Authority (ASN), downplayed the idea of a supranational nuclear watchdog.

"For the time being, in most of the major countries, the system of national authorities functions well," he argued at a press conference where he was flanked by counterparts from Britain and the United States.

"It's probably the only system which effectively enables an authority to close down (nuclear) installations."

Mike Weightman, Britain's chief inspector of nuclear installations, emphasised that national regulators should be separate from plant operators and immune to political pressure.

"We do push for independence of nuclear regulatory authorities, both in law but also in fact as well, the way in which we seek to ensure that we are not used in a political way," he said.

"It's important that we act in an objective way with our best judgements about difficult and complex issues, and that we are accountable to those we serve, which is the public and the parliament of the countries that we operate within."

(c) 2011 AFP

Citation: Watchdogs urge completion of post-Fukushima checks (2011, June 8) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-watchdogs-urge-post-fukushima.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.