

Turning commitments into actions:

France's efforts towards nuclear security

We are facing today in the nuclear field major challenges (Iranian nuclear crisis, threat of nuclear and radiological terrorism) but also great opportunities (development of nuclear energy, hope for progress in the area of disarmament). It is thus essential to promote nuclear security in order to make the most of these opportunities whilst minimising the risks.

France's nuclear security policy has three main aims: to promote the responsible development of civil nuclear energy, to combat nuclear proliferation, and to prevent nuclear and radiological terrorism.

National commitment

France is committed to the principle of primary responsibility of States with regard to nuclear security. Each individual State is best able to identify the threats which it faces and thus to provide the most appropriate response.

France has a complete and proven legislative infrastructure in this area, with its first law on the protection and control of nuclear material adopted in 1980. In particular, this legislation includes measures for the protection of vitally-important facilities, including nuclear facilities (defining a security plan, specific protection measures, a government-established external protection plan).

- French regulations on nuclear material and activities are based around three principles:
- governmental approval to import, export, develop, hold, transfer, use and transport nuclear material;
 - controlling authorised activities and measures taken to combat the theft, diversion or misuse of nuclear material;
 - if these regulations are breached, a prison sentence of up to ten years can be imposed.

French regulations also stipulate operators' obligations with regard to the physical protection, safe disposal and surveillance of nuclear material, as well as its physical monitoring and accounting in line with international conventions in force, the Euratom Treaty and IAEA recommendations. These specific provisions are supplemented by extensive anti-terrorism legislation and a proven prevention policy.

France is about to ratify the 2005 Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM). Furthermore, France calls upon States which have not already done so to accede to the CPPNM and ratify its amendment so that it may be quickly brought into force.

To go even further and set an example, France will also ask the IAEA to carry out an International Physical Protection Advisory Service mission in one of its fuel cycle facilities and one of its nuclear power plants.

Commitment within the framework of our bilateral cooperation

As the President of the French Republic recalled, “France wants to cooperate with all countries that wish to use civil nuclear energy,” in accordance with the highest standards of safety, security and non-proliferation.

To do this, our bilateral cooperation is supported by agreements on the development of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Parties are committed to implementing the appropriate measures for the physical protection of relevant materials, nuclear material, equipment and facilities, particularly in accordance with the provisions of the CPPNM. They are also committed to having the implementation of physical protection measures, while within their responsibility, based on recommendations from INFCIRC/225 of the IAEA.

With this approach, France is helping to develop a nuclear security culture in all States with which it concludes cooperation agreements. Through our interactions with States which want to set up a nuclear power program, we are continuing to raise public awareness on this key issue.

Industrial commitment

France chose a closed fuel cycle, which is proven in industry, economically viable and technically safe. Recycling considerably reduces the volume, thermal load and radio-toxicity of final waste. The recycled fissile material is used to produce Mox fuel, which for the past 30 years has been feeding civil reactors, and in the future will do so for 4th generation reactors. Recycling prevents spent fuel from accumulating and dispenses with the need to increase the number and the size of storage facilities, which in the long term could constitute a security risk. Recycling fissile material into Mox fuel means that this risk can be avoided and that plutonium’s energy capacity can be put to best use.

France therefore regards the closed fuel cycle as the best way to manage energy resources over the long term and under the best possible security conditions. However, the sensitivity of this operation means that only a limited number of countries possess the necessary reprocessing and enrichment facilities. These facilities must meet the highest safety, security and non-proliferation standards.

For countries which implement the strictest commitments on safety, security and non-proliferation, France will continue to offer its services for reprocessing spent fuel, including the return of final waste to the country of origin as well as the reuse of recovered nuclear material in the form of fuel elements.

Commitment supportive of the IAEA

The IAEA has a pivotal role to play in coordinating international efforts to strengthen nuclear security and protect against nuclear terrorism. France supports the IAEA’s action in these areas and actively participates in drawing up all recommendation documents and technical guides on nuclear security series.

France also considers that the IAEA’s statutory function regarding its verification activities under safeguards agreements and the additional protocol, through the control which it allows over the accounting and use of nuclear material, contributes to the general security effort. In this framework, we call for the IAEA’s safeguards system to be strengthened by

fully implementing all means at its disposal. France will provide the necessary support and resources for this work to continue.

Furthermore, France concluded an arrangement with the IAEA to draw up a French cooperation and support plan for nuclear security, implemented by the Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission. French support focuses, for example, on the physical protection and the accounting of nuclear material, the security of ionising radiation sources, detection and intervention in the event of an accident, the improvement of national systems and accession to relevant international instruments. Its main objective is to strengthen national capacities as regards the organisation of security, legislation, issues regarding methodology and expertise and, more generally, the security culture.

Under this plan, France and the IAEA are currently outlining an initiative aiming to compile a list of all existing spent radioactive sources of French origin in the world before proceeding with possible actions to secure or repatriate them.

Furthermore, France will increase its involvement in the Illicit Trafficking Database (ITDB) and the Malicious Acts Database (MAD), which are key instruments in the area of nuclear security. We call upon all participating States to feed these databases in order to build international knowledge on illicit trafficking and malicious acts to enable an efficient and coordinated campaign.

International commitment

France is involved in operations carried out both under the G8 Global Partnership and the Global Initiative To Combat Nuclear Terrorism. It has thus made a contribution in the Russian Federation, protecting fissile material resulting from the dismantlement of nuclear weapons, securing nuclear material from nuclear submarines and securing radioactive sources. It also withdrew nuclear electric generators which were powering the navigational markers in the Arctic Ocean and the Baltic Sea, as well as securing radioactive sources in Ukraine.

France welcomes the important work carried out under the G8 Global Partnership since its launch in 2002. Feedback must now be provided on this work, we will give this careful consideration before reflecting on the future of this initiative.

France is closely involved in the US-launched programme to convert research reactors running on highly-enriched uranium into reactors powered by low-enriched uranium. France, which is also carrying out a large-scale development programme for a high-density fuel based on uranium and molybdenum, an alternative to highly-enriched uranium, has already participated, through Areva, in the conversion of ten research reactors throughout the world.

Beyond these remediation actions, France provides training, which is one of its priorities, and thus contributes to prevention. Nuclear security will be part of the international curriculum offered by the European Nuclear Safety Training and Tutoring Institute and by the International Nuclear Energy Institute, whose creation was announced during the Paris Conference.