

PRESS RELEASE

IAEA Mission Says Japan's Regulatory Body Made Fast Progress, Sees Challenges Ahead

22 January 2016, Tokyo — An International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team of experts said Japan's regulatory body for nuclear and radiation safety has demonstrated independence and transparency since it was set up in 2012. The team also noted that it needs to further strengthen its technical competence in light of upcoming restarts of nuclear facilities.

The Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) team today concluded a 12-day mission to assess the regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety in Japan which was modified following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The modification included the establishment of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in September 2012.

“In the few years since its establishment, the NRA has demonstrated its independence and transparency. It has established new regulatory requirements for nuclear installations and reviewed the first restart applications by utilities,” said team leader Philippe Jamet, Commissioner of the French Nuclear Safety Authority. “This intensive and impressive work must continue with equal commitment, as there are still significant challenges in the years to come.”

IRRS missions are designed to strengthen the effectiveness of the national nuclear regulatory infrastructure, while recognizing the responsibility of each State to ensure nuclear safety.

Before being halted following the Fukushima Daiichi accident, Japan's nuclear power reactors produced about 30 per cent of the country's electricity generation. Two reactors were restarted in 2015 with NRA authorization, and the regulatory body is reviewing other restart applications using the new requirements. The country also has fuel cycle facilities, research reactors and widely uses nuclear applications in other fields.

The team of experts made recommendations and suggestions to the NRA and the Government to help them enhance the implementation of Japan's regulatory framework to strengthen nuclear and radiation safety.

They reviewed the responsibilities and functions of the Government and the regulatory body for safety, the authorization of nuclear and radiation facilities and activities, safety assessments, inspections of nuclear facilities, emergency preparedness and response, and several other areas in the field of nuclear and radiation safety.

The experts met with staff of the NRA, observed regulatory activities including inspections, and visited nuclear-related sites. They also met with other Japanese officials.

The IRRS team comprised 19 experts from 17 countries - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ireland, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America - and five IAEA staff.

“The IRRS team members made great efforts to thoroughly review the activities of the NRA,” said NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka. “NRA will seriously consider the findings in striving to further enhance nuclear safety and security in Japan.”

“Japan has reformed its regulatory system with impressive speed and effectiveness following the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Today, the system provides for clearer responsibilities and greater authority to the regulatory body,” said Juan Carlos Lentijo, IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department for Safety and Security. “The NRA is on a good path to continue this crucial progress in the future. Its work must continue to ensure that the new regulatory system is applied fully to all facilities and activities.”

The IRRS team identified good practices:

- The swift establishment of a legal and governmental framework that supports a new independent and transparent regulatory body with increased powers.
- NRA’s prompt and effective incorporation of lessons learnt from the Fukushima Daiichi accident in the areas of natural hazards, severe accident management, emergency preparedness and safety upgrades of existing facilities, into Japan’s new regulatory framework.

The mission provided recommendations and suggestions for improvements in most of the areas covered by the review. Examples include:

- The NRA should work to attract competent and experienced staff, and enhance staff skills relevant to nuclear and radiation safety through education, training, research and enhanced international cooperation.
- Japanese authorities should amend relevant legislation to allow NRA to perform more effective inspections of nuclear and radiation facilities.
- The NRA and all entities it regulates should continue to strengthen the promotion of safety culture, including by fostering a questioning attitude.

The final mission report will be provided to the Japanese Government in about three months. The Japanese Government has announced that it plans to make the report public.