

Message from the Director-General

Events in 2006 were marked not only by a growing interest in nuclear energy, but also by clear commitments to increase generating capacity in the years to come. Security of supply issues, global warming and high fossil fuel prices weighed heavily in the decision-making balance. But at the same time, it can reassure decision makers, stakeholders and the public at large that such decisions are being accompanied by tangible actions to make sure that the next generation of nuclear power plants is safer, more economical and more respectful of the environment than ever before.

The NEA programme of work covers a very full range of topics, with nuclear safety and regulation as the top priority in the Agency's 2005-2009 Strategic Plan. In addition, 15 international joint projects (see page 28 for details) are conducted under NEA auspices on nuclear safety matters. In a longer-term perspective, the Generation IV International Forum (GIF) continues to pursue its activities with far-reaching goals in mind, while also paying close attention to non-proliferation issues.

An important new development in 2006 was when the NEA was requested to provide the Technical Secretariat functions of Stage 2 of the Multinational Design Evaluation Programme (MDEP). The MDEP was set up to share the resources and knowledge accumulated by national nuclear regulatory authorities during their assessment of new reactor designs, with the aim of improving both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the process. The main objective of Stage 2 is to identify common regulatory practices and regulations that enhance the safety of new nuclear reactor designs. Ultimately this is expected to lead to a convergence of codes, standards and safety goals in the participating countries. Such convergence would help streamline many of the steps involved in bringing new plants online in the context of competitive markets worldwide, while at the same time maintaining the highest levels of safety.

The NEA membership is confident that many aspects of nuclear energy will be even further enhanced by the strengthened co-operation between the member countries and the Russian Federation which has recently been put in place. At the end of 2006, the OECD Council approved the Joint Declaration on Co-operation between the NEA and the Government of the Russian Federation in the Field of the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. As part of the planned forms of co-operation, starting on 1 January 2007, the Russian Federation was granted regular observer status in all the NEA standing technical committees (see page 42) and their working groups. This should provide ample opportunities for exchanges of knowledge and experience between NEA member country experts and their Russian counterparts, as well as to provide scope for enhanced safety in design, operation and decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

The Agency looks forward to continue contributing to the safe, environmentally friendly and economical use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in the years to come.



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NEA Director-General

