Enhancing Nuclear Security: Training And International Collaboration

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While a world free of nuclear weapons remains a goal for governments around the world, nuclear security constitutes a major challenge for the 21st century, as recognised at the 2010 nuclear security summit in Washington. Citizens are generally aware of international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but they are often unaware of nuclear security research and the important role science in this field. A new European nuclear security training centre and enhanced international collaboration are good examples.

A recent survey on the EU´s radiological vulnerability identified the need to train first responders at the European level as a priority. Following this finding, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) was tasked by the Directorate-General for Home Affairs to create a European nuclear security training centre (EUSECTRA) in order to meet this priority and complement national training efforts.

Implementation of the training centre commenced in 2010 and JRC experts are in charge of training on prevention and detection in nuclear security and responding to nuclear incident modules. In the field of detection, the JRC has jointly developed the syllabus, together with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) office for Nuclear Security, and the US Department of Energy (DOE), on two levels: one directly for front-line officers and one for their trainers and other experts. Specific sessions were already held for participants from Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe.

The training courses have a balanced approach between theoretical lectures and hands-on sessions, where participants have the opportunity to face realistic smuggling scenarios using real nuclear materials. Future training will also cover management of radiological crime scenes. In the forensics area, in particular, the focus of the training will be on nuclear forensic awareness, on establishing core capabilities in nuclear forensics and on the development and implementation of a national response plan.

The JRC was chosen for the implementation of the training centre due to its recognition as a centre of excellence by national and international authorities in the field of nuclear forensics.

International collaborations

In 2010, the JRC signed a collaboration agreement on nuclear safeguards and security with the US Department of Energy. The agreement covers nuclear safeguards technologies, R&D in nuclear forensics, co-operation in combating the illicit trafficking of nuclear and other radioactive materials, as well as training efforts

in related areas.

Furthermore, a similar agreement on nuclear security and combating illicit trafficking of nuclear material will be signed with the IAEA in 2011. These collaboration agreements will improve the effectiveness of co-operation in the field of nuclear security and foster the exchange of scientific and methodological information.

Another example of ongoing collaboration between the JRC and the US DOE is setting-up a project on Illicit Trafficking Radiation Assessment Programme (ITRAP+10). This project aims to develop and test certification procedures to assess the performances of commercial equipment used for the detection of radioactive and nuclear materials and to verify their conformity to international standards.

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