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Experiences, Challenges and Prospects in Decommissioning Nuclear Fuel Cycle Facilities in RSA

South Africa began decommissioning work in the mid-1990s when the country abandoned its historical nuclear program, which included uranium enrichment. These historical facilities are situated in Pelindaba at the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation site. A total of 36 facilities have been categorised as historical facilities and are currently in the process of going through the last stages of the decommissioning process. There have been several facilities that have been successfully decommissioned and have been repurposed for non-radiological operations. There have also been a great number of facilities that have been retained under Care and Maintenance (passive safety) while they wait to be repurposed or removed from regulatory oversight. Many of these facilities were built between the 1960s and the 1980s without considering the decommissioning process or the waste streams generated during the decommissioning process. As a consequence of these, several challenges and valuable lessons were learnt.

This paper aims to discuss the current status and prospects of decommissioning nuclear facilities in South Africa. Additionally, this paper will highlight significant wins and challenges that were faced during the process of decommissioning. In this article, the deficiencies in the decommissioning regulatory framework and governance are briefly discussed.

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