

The UK and European Response to Fukushima

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Following the accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi site, ONR's Chief Nuclear Inspector reported on the implications and lessons learnt for the UK nuclear industry. This review extended to all UK nuclear licenced sites and concluded that analysis of the Fukushima Dai-ichi accident revealed no fundamental safety weaknesses in the UK nuclear industry. However, 38 areas were identified where lessons could be learned in the UK from the crisis in Japan.

In developing its response to Fukushima, ONR co-operated extensively with international organisations, notably with the IAEA and the Western European Nuclear Regulators Association (WENRA). ONR's approach was consistent with European response to Fukushima, developed by the European Commission and European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG).

The report highlighted the importance of the principle of "continuous improvement" to achieving high standards of nuclear safety. This principle is embedded in UK law, where there is a requirement for nuclear designers and operators to reduced risks so far as is reasonably practicable. This is underpinned by the requirement for detailed periodic reviews of safety (throughout the life of an installation) to seek further improvements. This means that, no matter how high the standards of nuclear design and subsequent operation are, the quest for improvement should never stop. Seeking to learn from events, new knowledge and experience, both nationally and internationally, is a fundamental feature of the safety culture in the UK nuclear industry.

Whenever a major accident occurs there are, not unreasonably, questions and comments directed to the regulatory body in relation to its role overseeing the safety of facilities. Often questions arise over the independence of the regulator, and the approach taken for individual regulatory decisions. The concept of "intelligent customer" has developed in UK to ensure that organisations account for their legal duties for any work commissioned externally. Applied to the regulatory context, this concept requires regulators to have sufficient competent resource within the regulatory body to specify, oversee and accept support provided under technical support contracts. Regulatory decisions are made by the warranted inspectors to safeguard regulatory independence.

Country or International Organisation

UK

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