

Networking policy of the EU

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The European Union has under the Euratom Treaty (1957) important responsibilities for the establishment of uniform safety standards for the health protection of workers and members of the public. The latest such standards were laid down in Council Directive 96/29/EURATOM, which are now being revised along the new ICRP Recommendations, in parallel to the international standards.

Uniformity of the standards has been pursued in reality only for such basic requirements as the dose limits and the definition of dosimetric quantities. Harmonisation needs to be balanced against a need for operational flexibility and against the need for incorporation in different national legal frameworks. European Directives lay down the objective to be achieved through transposition into national law. The Commission checks draft national legislation and final measures, and if necessary starts an infringement procedure against a Member State that would not timely and correctly transpose a Directive.

Operational radiation protection, in particular the application of the principles of justification and optimisation, is largely a national matter. Also the regime of regulatory control (authorisation) as well as the establishment of emergency plans are a national responsibility. Member States' competent authorities as well as other parties implementing the Standards nevertheless are in need for guidance and fully recognise the benefit of harmonisation at operational level.

The Commission has over many decades responded to this need by launching studies, organising conferences, making recommendations (through the "Article 31" Group of Experts), and by answering ad-hoc requests. With now 27 Member States it becomes very difficult for the Commission to manage this operational responsibility. It is therefore necessary to explore a more de-centralised approach.

Such an approach is pursued on the one hand through specific provisions in the Standards requesting cooperation between Member States, e.g. for emergency planning. With the new Standards also cooperation will be requested for the type-approval of apparatus and consumer goods.

In parallel to the initiatives of the Commission, the heads of European Radiation Control Authorities regularly meet to discuss practical problems and to harmonise administrative and technical requirements. Where Member States would identify a need for legislative action, the right of initiative is nevertheless with the Commission, through the Group of Experts established under Article 31 Euratom Treaty.

The Commission has launched several initiatives for the establishment of platforms and networks. For instance, the European Education and Training platform (EUTERP) will be instrumental in facilitating the mutual recognition of radiation protection experts. The main fora fostering progress in operational protection are however the so-called "ALARA-networks". The main network, initially funded by the Commission under its framework programmes for research, is now self-sustained. Additional networks are now being set up for ALARA in NORM-industries, non-destructive testing and medical areas. Another example is the European Study on Occupational Radiation Exposure (ESOREX) through which experts working in the area of occupational radiation monitoring and exposure could establish a topical network.

The Commission hopes that eventually similar networks will exist in all areas of protection: occupational, medical and public exposure, and that these will become an efficient tool for the exchange of experience, fostering good practice and involving stakeholders. European networks should to the extent possible be closely linked to similar international networks.

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