

LES RECOMMANDATIONS INTERNATIONALES EN RADIOPROTECTION

The role and recent activities of the ILO concerning the radiation protection of workers (ionizing radiation)

Le rôle et les activités récentes de l'Organisation internationale du travail en matière de radioprotection des travailleurs

by **Dr Shengli Niu**, Senior Specialist in Occupational Health In Focus programme on Safety and Health at Work (SafeWork) – International Labour Office (ILO)

The protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of employment is one of the tasks assigned to the ILO in the words of the Preamble of its Constitution. The development of international standards in the form of Conventions and Recommendations is one of the main functions of the ILO. These standards, which are adopted by the International Labour Conference, cover labour and social issues. As a package, they constitute the International Labour Code which defines minimum standards in the labour and social fields.

Between 1919 and 2004, 185 Conventions and 195 Recommendations were adopted. Close to 50 per cent of these instruments relate directly or indirectly to occupational safety and health. Conventions and Recommendations relevant to occupational radiation protection are listed in the Annex; among them Convention No. 115 and Recommendation No. 114 deal specifically with the protection of workers against radiation (ionizing).

The 1984 International Labour Conference Resolution concerning the improvement of the working conditions and environment, laid down the following principles:

- work should take place in a safe and healthy working environment;
- conditions of work should be consistent with workers' well-being and human dignity;
- work should offer real possibilities for personal achievement, self-fulfilment and service to society.

Based on the above fundamental objectives and principles, the InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork) of the ILO aims to increase the capacity in member States to prevent occupational accidents and work-related diseases and improve the working conditions.

The objectives of the ILO's programmes of activities in the field of occupational safety and health aim essentially at:

- reducing the number and seriousness of occupational accidents and diseases;
- adapting the working environment, equipment and work process to the physical and mental capacity of the worker;
- enhancing the physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations;
- encouraging national policies and programmes of member States and supplying appropriate assistance.

The protection of the worker against ionizing radiations falls naturally within the scope of ILO's programme of action on occupational safety and health which uses, in a coordinated manner, the various means of action available to the ILO to give governments, employers' and workers' organizations the necessary help in drawing up and implementing programmes for the improvement of working conditions and environment.

The ILO has had a long history in development of international guidance on radiation protection of workers. The ILO Conventions are a powerful mecha-

Executive Summary

L'organisation Internationale du Travail (OIT) créée en 1919 a pour vocation de promouvoir la justice sociale et notamment de faire respecter les droits de l'homme dans le monde du travail. L'OIT met au point des conventions et des recommandations internationales du travail qui définissent les normes minimales à respecter dans les domaines de son ressort. En particulier, l'OIT a pour objectifs de réduire les accidents et les pathologies liés au travail. Dans le domaine de la protection des travailleurs contre les rayonnements ionisants, l'ILO collabore avec les autres organisations internationales (AIEA, OMS...) pour l'élaboration des normes de base de radioprotection des travailleurs.



nism in international law by which to motivate states to implement and demonstrate safety and health provisions complying with current international standards. In this respect, Convention (No. 115) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 114) concerning the protection of workers against ionizing radiations are the basis for ILO action in the area of protection of workers against exposure to ionizing radiation. The ILO Convention 115 has been and remains effective. Convention has so far been ratified by 47 countries. Activities are being taken to increase this effectiveness by working with other international organizations, in particular with the IAEA and the WHO, towards its more widespread ratification and implementation in the Member States.

There has been a long-standing history of efficient interagency cooperation on radiation protection which was strengthened by the establishment in 1986 of an Interagency Committee for Nuclear Accident Response (IAC/NR) which was later renamed as the Interagency Committee for the Response to Nuclear Accidents (ICRNA) and by the establishment in 1990 of an Interagency Committee on Radiation Safety (IACRS).

The development of the International Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Ionizing Radiation and for the Safety of Radiation Sources (BSS) which was published in 1994 mark the culmination of efforts that have continued over the past several decades towards the harmonization of radiation protection and safety standards internationally. The unprecedented international effort to draft and review the Standards involved hundreds of experts from the member States of the sponsoring organizations, from specialized organizations and from employers' and workers' organizations. The Standards is jointly sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/NEA), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Published in 2001 and jointly sponsored by FAO, IAEA, ILO, OECD/NEA, PAHO, OCHA and WHO, the Safety Requirements on Preparedness and Response for a Nuclear and Radiological Emergency incorporates and establishes requirements for emergency preparedness and response so that emergency management can be seen in its

entirety by the bodies concerned. These safety requirements are binding on the IAEA in relation to its own operations and on the states in relation to operations assisted by the IAEA.

The supporting Safety Guides relevant to occupational radiation protection which have been developed so far include :

- occupational Radiation Protection;
- assessment of Occupational Exposure due to External Sources of Radiation;
- assessment of Occupational Exposure due to Intakes of Radionuclides (these three Safety Standards were co-sponsored by ILO and IAEA and published in 1999);
- building Competence in Radiation Protection and the Safe Use of Radiation Sources (jointly sponsored by IAEA, ILO, PAHO and WHO, published in 2001).

There are also some Safety Standards on specific sectors, particularly Occupational Radiation Protection in the Mining and Processing of Raw Materials (co-sponsored by ILO and IAEA) which was published this summer. Other publications which were jointly developed by the IAEA, ILO and WHO include the Health Surveillance of Persons Occupationally Exposed to Ionizing Radiation (published by the IAEA 1998), the Organization and Operation of a National Regulatory Infrastructure Governing Radiation and Safety of Radiation Sources (published by the IAEA in 1999) and a five-volume Manual on Radiation Protection in Hospitals and General Practice (to be published by WHO).

The current activities of the ILO are centred on the promotion of the active involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the formulation of international standards on occupational radiation protection and the implementation of the BSS and the Safety Fundamentals at both international and national levels. At the international level, the ILO is closely associated with the work of IAEA's Radiation Safety Standards Advisory Committee (RASSAC) which is vested with the important mission of reviewing the Agency's Safety Series documents on radiation protection and safety of radiation sources and the Agency's programme of work for the preparation of these documents. Within the framework of the IACRS, the ILO and other member organizations discuss international policies and standards on radiation protection and coordinate among themselves radiation protection activities carried out by individual member organizations.

With a view to protecting workers against exposure to ionizing radiation and to promoting the implementation of the ILO Convention on radiation protection, 1960 (No. 115), the Office joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Commission (EC) and the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements (ICRU), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) and the International Society of Radiology (ISR) in convening an International Conference on Occupational Radiation Protection at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva in August 2002. The conference was hosted by the Swiss Government and attended by 328 participants from 72 countries and 12 organizations including employers' and workers' organizations. The Conference was the first international conference to cover the whole area of occupational radiation protection, including infrastructure development, radiation monitoring, stakeholder involvement, and the probability of causation of occupational harm attributable to radiation exposure.

The findings and recommendations of the Conference were considered in September 2002 by the IAEA General Conference, which requested the IAEA "... to look into the possibility of the IAEA co-operating with the International Labour Organization and other relevant bodies in formulating and implementing...an international action plan for occupational radiation protection".

An Action Plan for Occupational Radiation Protection was developed by the IAEA in co-operation with the Office and reviewed by the organizations involved in the Geneva Conference, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). The Action Plan was approved by the IAEA Board of Governors on 8 September 2003. The overall objective of the Action Plan is to focus the efforts of the relevant international organizations, in particular the IAEA and ILO, to assist their Member States in establishing, maintaining and, where necessary, improving programmes for the radiation protection of occupationally exposed workers.

The proposed actions include: joint promotion of the ILO Convention No. 115, review of the ILO code

of practice on "Radiation protection of workers (ionising radiations), co-operation between the IAEA and ILO in reaching developing countries, information exchange to promote greater awareness and understanding, education and awareness, exposure to enhanced natural radiation in the workplace, promotion of a holistic approach to workplace safety, formulation and application of standards for the protection of pregnant workers and their embryos and fetuses, probability of causation of occupational harm attributable to radiation exposure.

In order to ensure the successful implementation of the Action Plan, the IAEA in cooperation with the ILO has established a Steering Committee with the overall remit to advise on, monitor, and assist in the practical implementation of the Action Plan. Participants in the Steering Committee consist of representatives of a number of interested Member States (Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, United Kingdom, United States of America) and interested international organizations (IAEA, ILO, WHO, EC, OECD/NEA, ICFTU, IOE, IRPA and ISA). ■

