

Survey on the implementation of the Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety.

Today the Storting was presented with Document no. 3:9 (2000-2001), the Office of the Auditor General's investigation into the government's implementation of the Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety.

The investigation shows that some of the projects under the Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety Issues have helped to enhance safety and prevent accidents at nuclear installations in Russia and other Eastern European countries, whereas other projects have been characterised by standstills, delays and lack of effectiveness. For example, several major investment projects are either delayed or have come to a halt. The Office of the Auditor General also points out that there has been modest activity connected with the plan of action's objective of helping reduce the need for nuclear power in North-western Russia.

The Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety was drawn up in 1995, and so far a total of NOK 590 million has been appropriated for the plan. The Norwegian effort is primarily concentrated on North-western Russia, though it includes some projects in the Baltic and Central and Eastern European states. The overarching objective for Norwegian assistance for nuclear activities is to protect health, the environment and economic activity from radioactive contamination and pollution from chemical weapons in Russia and other Eastern European countries.

As a more successful project under the plan of action, the audit shows, for instance, that the risk of an accident at the Kola Nuclear Power Plant has been reduced as a result of Norwegian assistance, among other factors. Yet at the same time it is probable that the nuclear power plant will be granted an extension of its operating permit because safety conditions at the plant are noticeably improved. If so, this will be at variance with the objective that the efforts should not extend the plant's effective life.

Examples of projects that are delayed or have an uncertain future, are the construction of a special vessel for transporting spent nuclear fuel and other nuclear waste from scrapped nuclear submarines and the establishment of a storage facility for solid radioactive waste on the Kola peninsula. Likewise the construction of a new intermediate storage facility for spent nuclear fuel at the Mayak plant in the Urals has come to a halt.

According to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since 1997 they have increasingly been trying to use the action plan's funds for building infrastructure in Russia, because the country lacks the necessary equipment and installations for transporting, processing and storing spent uranium fuel and radioactive waste. The ministry's explanation for the fact that several major investment and development projects are delayed or come to a halt is that the Norwegian side is making demands of their Russian counterparts that they have not been able to accept or meet immediately.

In the main, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agrees with the findings and assessments of the Office of the Auditor General, and has stated that it has already implemented measures for improving and streamlining the work connected with the Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety.