

SITEX.Network is concerned about the sustainability of IRSN

SITEX.Network is concerned about the recent news that IRSN, one of its members, may be dissolved during the reorganization of the French nuclear safety governance currently under discussion.

SITEX.Network is an international network in the field of safety of radioactive waste management, currently made up of 16 organisations from 12 countries, bringing together nuclear safety authorities, technical safety organisations (TSOs) and representatives of the civil society (CS). SITEX.Network purpose is to enhance and foster cooperation at the international level to achieve a high quality of expertise in the field of radioactive waste management (RWM) safety, independent from organizations responsible for the implementation of waste management programs and waste producers, aiming at supporting the safety Regulatory Authorities, as well as the CS.

As an internationally recognized French institutional TSO, IRSN is one of the founding members of the SITEX.Network. It chaired the network for four years and plays a leading role in its four main areas of activity: research, safety assessment, dialogue with CS, training.

The information available to SITEX.Network to date indicates that the evolution of safety governance announced on 8 February and currently being debated in the French Parliament as part of a new law on the "acceleration of the nuclear industry" could lead to IRSN being merged, in whole or in part, with the French Nuclear Safety Authority (ASN). SITEX.Network is wondering about this sudden evolution and the possible consequences on its work.

Is the sustainability of IRSN's research and development (R&D) activities at risk?

IRSN's integrated model in the field of safety of radioactive waste management, which brings together researchers and safety experts in one team, gives IRSN an overall vision that is of interest notably for the development and deployment of TSOs research agendas¹. It allows experts to steer research agendas towards relevant safety topics and researchers to challenge expertise. This cross-fertilisation within IRSN between researchers and experts brings added value to SITEX.Network. IRSN also has experimental resources that are independent of nuclear operators, including its underground laboratory at Tournemire² (Aveyron, France) that is dedicated to R&D on geological disposal of radioactive waste; the underground laboratory is a unique independent facility on a European scale. It allows IRSN and the SITEX.Network members to conduct or access independent research, as recommended by the IAEA³.

¹ [SITEX SRA ; PowerPoint Presentation \(iaea.org\) ; SITEX Network PP EURAD SRA Update FINAL.pdf](#)

² [La station expérimentale de Tournemire \(irsn.fr\)](#)

³ [Statement of the ETSON Board on the renewed interest and initiatives in nuclear energy | etson.eu](#) (« all regulatory functions should be performed based on technical and scientific work independently performed »)

Will it still be possible for IRSN to participate in benchmarking work on expertise approaches?

IRSN uses calculation software internally developed to assess safety cases submitted by operators in several key areas such as the behavior of gases or radionuclides in the context of geological disposal. Its participation in the benchmarks organized by SITEX.Network is beneficial in terms of sharing both its expertise and the modeling it can perform using its own tools.

Will the technical dialogue between institutional and non-institutional stakeholders lose support?

IRSN has made a major contribution to SITEX.Network's activities in this area, such as the development and implementation of the PEP serious game⁴, aiming to facilitate discussions on the safety of the management of radioactive waste between people with different backgrounds, or the literature review on possible advantages and limitations of deep borehole disposal⁵. The involvement of CS in the European Commission's program dedicated to research and knowledge management about radioactive waste management (European Joint Programme (EJP) EURAD⁶) was also possible thanks to IRSN, which is the only EJP beneficiary that has co-opted the two organizations allowing to liaise with CS, enabling them to participate in the EJP.

Will the new entity formed be eligible for membership of the EURAD EJP which hosts the training provided by SITEX.Network?

To date, a safety authority cannot be a member of the above-mentioned EJP. If IRSN merges with ASN, there is a risk that the research activities that would be sustained in the new entity, as well as the SITEX.Network training activities to which IRSN contributes within this EJP, would no longer be co-funded by the European Commission. The mutual benefit of sharing actions of this type on the European scale would thereby be lost.

The SITEX.Network Management Board points out that the ASN has not wanted to be a member of SITEX.Network until now, in particular because of its involvement in a specific European network of safety authorities (WENRA). SITEX.Network hopes to be able to rely on the competence and know-how of IRSN or, if the ASN-IRSN merging should take place, that this new entity will join the SITEX.Network and the EURAD programme, and will continue to provide the benefit of a global vision integrating expertise and R&D.

The SITEX.Network Management Board

⁴ [Lunch-and-learn session - A pluralistic tool of dialogue on RWM - the Pathway Evaluation Process \(PEP\) | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

⁵ [SITEX.Network Topical Day 2020 on Deep Borehole Repositories | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

⁶ [About | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#): 51 Mandated Organisations and 61 Linked Third Parties from 23 countries;