

IAEA Sees No Radiation-Related Risk from Fires in Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

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The recent fires in the Exclusion Zone near the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Ukraine have not led to any hazardous increase of radioactive particles in the air, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said today.

Basing its assessment on data provided by Ukraine, the IAEA said the increase in levels of radiation measured in the country was very small and posed no risk to human health.

“In addition, these radiation levels fall significantly with increasing distance from the site of the fires,” said Elena Buglova, Head of the IAEA’s Incident and Emergency Centre (IEC), which has been in close contact with Ukrainian authorities since the fires began in early April.

The State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine (SNRIU) has regularly provided information on this month’s fires through the IAEA’s Unified System for Information Exchange in Incidents and Emergencies (USIE), the 24/7 secure website for Member States to exchange information. For its part, the IAEA’s IEC communicated via USIE with contact points in other Member States and international organizations and answered their questions.

On 8 April, SNRIU reported via USIE that nuclear and radioactive waste management facilities in the Exclusion Zone were safe and there was no need to evacuate plant workers or take other protective measures for staff there.

The Ukrainian authorities have a network of radiation monitoring stations country-wide and around the Chernobyl NPP, whose last operating reactor was shut down two decades ago. The SNRIU on April 14, 17, 20 and 22 provided updated information on USIE on measurements of radiation levels in the air.

The burning of meadows, pastures and stubble has resulted in some minor increases in radiation due to the release of radionuclides transferred from soil contaminated in the 1986 accident. But the concentration of radioactive materials in the air remained below Ukraine’s radiation safety norms and posed no public health concern, the SNRIU said

Ukraine has informed the IAEA that environment monitoring laboratories at the country’s operating NPPs, the Ukrainian Hydrometeorological Centre, the Ukrainian Hydrometeorological Institute, the Chernobyl NPP and the SSE “Ecocentre” in the Exclusion Zone continue to monitor the level of radiation in the air in close communication and coordination with SNRIU.

The accident at the Chernobyl NPP in 1986 was the most severe in the history of the nuclear power industry, causing a huge release of radionuclides over large areas of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Since 1986, radiation levels in the environment have fallen significantly, due to natural processes and counter measures. Most of the land contaminated with radionuclides has been made safe and returned to economic activity.

The IAEA provided extensive assistance to the regions affected by the disaster, including in the remediation of affected cities and farmland, monitoring of human exposure to radiation, and dissemination of information. The IAEA has continued to help with decommissioning of the reactors and radioactive waste management at the site.