

Nuclear Events Web-based System (NEWS)

BACKGROUND:

The Nuclear Events Web-based System (NEWS) was created to be used in the case of a significant nuclear event. The information provided by the media is frequently very incomplete and often misleading. Experience has shown that the source of information on nuclear events for the national media is the national experts rather than the experts from the country where the event occurs. These experts are expected to provide information on the nuclear event and an assessment of its possible consequences at a very early stage. It is therefore very important that national experts obtain firsthand information on the nature and scope of a nuclear event. Getting this firsthand information at an early stage has proven to be difficult during past events. It is anticipated that NEWS will provide a means of obtaining this firsthand information on events.

DESCRIPTION:

NEWS is a secure, internet-based communications system that allows for rapid transmission of information among regulators, operators and technical support organizations. Access into NEWS consists of three levels. The first level is reserved for INES national officers and is used to submit INES reports. (The web submittal will eventually replace the current facsimile.) Web-based INES was developed simultaneously with NEWS to minimize costs and to keep the database maintenance workload to a minimum. The second level is for nuclear facilities/utilities. This level provides write access for press releases and related documents. The lowest level, level three, is designed to encourage discussions of ongoing events in near real time by technical experts. Level three is a discussion forum where various discussion threads maybe be started and followed. It is anticipated that level three will provide the most benefit to the average user. The specific detailed guidance regarding authorization, access and use is still being developed by IAEA.

STATUS:

The software to support level three has been developed by IAEA using the YEWS (Y2k Early Warning System) software as a model. A prototype version of this system has been completed and is currently undergoing preoperational testing. This testing is expected to last until the end of 2001. Additional software improvements will be made as experience is gained with the system.

A NEWS user's guide is under development at IAEA along with suggested guidelines for its use. The user's guide will cover the details of operating the software. The guidelines will discuss how NEWS is envisioned to be utilized and the relationship between regulating entities and the facilities they regulate with respect to providing information to NEWS. These steps must be completed before NEWS can be utilized by member states.

NEA has proposed a meeting in mid 2001 among NEA, IAEA, WANO and NRC (as part of our INES working group responsibilities) to develop the appropriate guidelines. The results of this meeting should leave NEA, IAEA and WANO positioned to put out a call for registration and significantly increase participation beyond the group of INES national officers.