Commission communication on the implementation of Council Directive 89/618/Euratom of 27 November 1989 on informing the general public about health protection measures to be applied and steps to be taken in the event of a radiological emergency

(91/C 103/03)

For the purposes of implementing Council Directive 89/618/Euratom of 27 November 1989 on informing the general public about health protection measures to be applied and steps to be taken in the event of a radiological emergency[1], the Commission, having consulted the group of scientific experts referred to in Article 31 of the Euratom Treaty, wishes to communicate the following information concerning Articles 5 and 6 of the said Directive and the Annexes thereto:

I. GENERAL REMARKS

1. The purpose of this communication is to help the Member States in transposing the Directive into national law.

It should be regarded as a reference document since Member States are bound only by the provisions of the Directive.

In order to be as helpful as possible some examples are quoted as to ways in which the objectives are achieved in some Member States.

2. The aim of the Council in adopting this Directive on 27 November 1989 was to supplement Council Directive 80/836/Euratom of 15 July 1980 amending the Directives laying down the basic safety standards for the health protection of the general public and workers against the dangers of ionizing radiation[2], especially Article 45 which requires Member States to stipulate intervention levels and the necessary resources to safeguard the health of the population in the event of an accident.

3. Directive 89/618/Euratom lays down two types of action:

- prior information to be given in a normal situation to the population likely to be affected (Article 5 of the Directive),

- information to be given in the event of a radiological emergency to the population actually affected (Article 6 of the Directive).

These two types of information are complementary and should therefore both be given whenever it is possible to do so; this should always be the case for fixed plant or facilities covered by Article 2. For transport or nuclear powered satellite accidents it will often not be possible to give 'prior Information', but in many situations it may be possible to give 'early Information' during a pre-alarm phase, e.g. as when a satellite begins a descent which will last several days or even weeks, or when a ship is beached but the containers of the radioactive materials it is carrying are not breached. In such a pre-alarm phase 'early Information' could be given as preparation for any necessary further information if the event does proceed to a significant release of radioactivity.

4. The two types of information laid down by the Directive cover not only the protection measures and behaviour to be adopted in the event of an emergency but also the basic facts about radioactivity and its effects.

5. Experience in implementing Article 8 of Council Directive 82/501/EEC of 24 June 1982 on the major-accident hazards of certain industrial activities[3], which is known as the 'Seveso' Directive and concerns information to be supplied to the persons liable to be affected on the hazards of major accidents other than nuclear accidents, has shown that in order to be effective any policy for providing information to the general public on technological hazards must ensure that:

- there is a high degree of cooperation between the parties involved (national, regional and local authorities and plant operators).

  Agreements can be concluded with the parties concerned regarding the division of responsibilities, methods and timetable for communicating information and the content of the information,

- the provision of information to the general public forms an integral part of emergency planning.

6. Where similar advice is given about emergency plans for other serious industrial accidents, it may be beneficial to include all the advice in one document, to avoid confusing and annoying the general public.

II. PRIOR INFORMATION

A. Organization of the dissemination of information (Article 5)

1. A clear distinction must be made between regional or local populations, for which there are regional or local intervention plans relating to fixed installations, and the population as a whole,

[1] OJ No L 357, 7. 12. 1989, p. 31.
[2] OJ No L 246, 17. 9. 1980, p. 1.
[3] OJ No L 230, 5. 8. 1982, p. 1.

for which a national intervention plan may be drawn up to deal also with accidents outside national borders or resulting from activities not related to fixed installations (e.g. accidents during the transport of radioactive materials).

The prior information which must be given to these two categories of population under Article 5 is of two different types. The information given to the persons in the vicinity of fixed installations could be more detailed than that given to the population as a whole, since the latter is less likely to be affected by a radiological emergency.

One of the functions of the information provided at regional or local level should be to 'prepare the ground' by giving specific information in advance to those playing a key role in the dissemination of information, e.g. plant personnel, local politicians and journalists, as well as to those with direct responsibilities for carrying out the intervention plan.

2. The creation of local committees including, for example, representatives of local authorities, competent national authorities and relevant organizations could play a decisive role in providing adequate and detailed information to the local population concerned.

3. The basic intervention plan is, perhaps, one of the most effective information tools. It could be published in an appropriate form and made widely available for the general public.

Also the public could be allowed to consult their regional or local intervention plans under conditions determined by the competent authorities taking into account confidentiality and national security needs.

4. Information could also be provided as part of the curricula adopted in schools at all levels.

5. The Member States must provide information to the general public on their own initiative, without receiving a request to do so (Article 5 (3) of the Directive).

6. The competent authorities in the Member States should decide how individuals are to receive the information - for example by means of a letter or information leaflet addressed to them - and set out in detail how to inform the local population, as a community - for example by displaying public notices within a certain radius, placing notices in local newspapers, radio or television, organizing exhibitions providing plans, literature, illustrations and models, arranging visits to installations and holding public meetings.

In a public announcement or in the information disseminated by letter or information leaflet the auhorities could specify the places and bodies where additional information may be consulted or obtained.

The Member States may also wish to consider incorporating prior information in other publications that are more likely to remain available in case of need, e.g. in telephone directories.

7. The Member States are responsible for laying down the intervals at which information is to be distributed. The intervals must be sufficiently close to ensure that up to date information is available at all times, e.g. every two or three years.

8. Whatever the normal frequency of re-issue, the information distributed should also be updated whenever major changes made to intervention plans have a practical impact on the population. For example, these would include changes affecting the system of alert, the protection measures and the area covered by the intervention plan.

B. Determining the content of the information (Annex I to the Directive)

TRANSPARENCY CREATES CONFIDENCE

1. In normal circumstances the information provided should be primarily instructive and aimed at reassuring the general public that emergency plans exist, both at national level for hazards associated also with non-fixed installations or originating outside national borders, and at regional or local level for fixed installations.

In order to ensure that the general public takes the message seriously without exaggerating the scale of the hazard, the information should be credible and allow the general public to see that the emergency plans drawn up would be implemented in the event of a real emergency.

2. The four points set out in Annex I must be covered by the prior information, even in the case of the information given to the entire population in a national information plan.

The information disseminated by the Member States may include other items not laid down in Annex I. This principle is set out in Article 11 of the Directive.

It is also important to provide information on radiation protection, not just in relation to the hazards of nuclear energy but covering all radiation sources that may give rise to a radiological emergency.

3. Basic facts about radioactivity and its effects

The following aspects could be covered in the prior information communicated:

The basic facts on radioactivity

Paying particular attention to the terminology used, scientific concepts should cover the physical and dosimetric aspects of radiation:

- explanations of 'activity' and 'dose',

- the scientific units connected with these quantities concepts (mention only Becquerels and Sieverts),

- a comparison between natural radioactivity and artificial radioactivity.

Effects on human beings and on the environment

- Explain the difference between irradiation and contamination.

- Explain the distinction between immediate effects and delayed effects.

- Pathways to man including transfer through the food chain.

It would also be advisable to include the general principles of radiation protection with this general information.

4. The various types of radiological emergency and their consequences for the population and the environment

The information for the population living near an installation should cover:

- a simple explanation of the work carried out at the installation,

- the unlikely possibility of an accident having any impact on the population,

- the types of emissions (gas, dust, liquid) which would be released from the installation in the event of an accident, and how far and how quickly they would spread.

  The International Nuclear Event Scale (INES) could be very useful for explaining the consequences of the various situations.

5. Emergency measures envisaged to alert, protect and assist the population in the event of a radiological emergency

- Specify the means used to give the alert (sirens, radio, television, police).

- For local intervention plans, give a general description of how they are organized and of the protection measures.

6. Appropriate information on action to be taken by the population in the event of a radiological emergency

The information on action in the short-term (from the first hours to the first days following the accident) could include listening for the alert, sheltering, listening to the radio and awaiting instructions.

The information on action in the longer term could cover self-protection measures and observance of the decontamination instructions and, for example, conditions for consumption of foodstuffs and drinking water.

III. INFORMATION IN THE EVENT OF A RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

A. Organization of the dissemination of information (Article 6 of the Directive)

1. In the event of a real radiological emergency, information must be provided systematically, rapidly and openly in order to encourage the population actually affected to adopt the appropriate behaviour.

This cannot be achieved without obtaining the confidence of the population.

The credibility of the information depends very much on the time taken to provide it and how dissemination is organized.

As laid down in Article 6 (1), the information must be provided without delay, since lack of information and ignorance of the facts may produce anxiety and unforeseeable reactions on the part of the general public. The Member States can therefore, if appropriate, begin informing the population at the pre-alarm phase (see Annex II (2)).

The most direct sources of information should be used (national, regional and local press and radio, television, direct answers by telephone and, if appropriate, computerized magazines such as teletexts).

Every step should be taken to ensure that sources of information are not giving contradictory information, e.g. by creating or appointing a national information dissemination agency with a coordinating function.

2. The requirement for the Member States to provide information in a real radiological emergency applies to any situation likely to result in the general public receiving a dose during a period of one year following the accident in excess of the annual dose limit specified by the Directive laying down the Community's basic safety standards on radiation protection (see Article 12 of Directive 80/836/Euratom).

B. Determining the content of the information (Annex II to the Directive)

1. The information must be appropriate to the situation in question and need not necessarily cover all the points set out in Annex II. There are various types of situation which might arise:

- pre-alarm situations (Annex II (2)),
- situations where the type of accident is known (Annex II (1) (a)),
- situations where protective measures and action are required (Annex II (1) (b) and (c): list of options depending on the circumstances).

2. The Directive defines common objectives with regard to information aspects of the emergency plans:

- the broad outlines of intervention plans should be made known to the general public in advance,
- they should also include arrangements for providing information in an accident situation in accordance with Annex II to the Directive.

3. Depending on the type of radiological emergency, the information provided should cover the following:

Information on the radiological emergency:

- the location, date and time of the accident,
- the type of radiological emergency,
- the main characteristics of the radioactive substances released,
- the area under threat,
- the probable development of the situation and the influence of climatic and meteorological factors.

Advice on protection:

- moving around outside and staying indoors,
- conditions for consuming food and drinking water (dilution, cleaning),
- restrictions and warnings on consumption,
- if appropriate, arrangements for supplying uncontaminated food and water,
- use of clothing and footwear,
- personal hygiene,
- distribution of iodine tablets,
- evacuation arrangements:
    - public transport (stops and timetable),
    - routes for private vehicles and road traffic restrictions,
    - shelters and their capacities,
    - medical centres and arrangements for providing medical care.

4. Special instructions for certain population groups

If appropriate, additional information may be disseminated for children and pregnant women (advice on food consumption, information on exposure of the embryo and foetus) and farmers (advice on harvesting conditions and protecting livestock).

Where doctors, teachers and journalists are channels of information they should therefore receive fuller details, right from the pre-alarm phase if such a phase is announced.

The heads of educational establishments, social institutions (e.g. homes for the aged), health institutions and industrial establishments should also receive information and advice at the pre-alarm phase on the action to be taken by the groups for which they are responsible.

5. Advice to the population to follow the instructions given

The population should be encouraged to follow the instructions of competent authorities in the event of a radiological emergency (e.g. staying indoors or being evacuated).

6. Basic facts about radioactivity and its effects

In practice it may prove difficult, during the first days following an accident, to distribute relevant supplementary information on radioactivity and its effects. Such information should therefore be provided subsequently.

IV.FINAL REMARKS

1. The Commission suggests that the Member States take due account of this communication when introducing or adapting the regulations and administrative practices that are suitable for transposing the Directive into national law.

2. The Commission points out that Article 33 of the Euratom Treaty requires Member States to communicate to the Commission any draft provisions to be laid down, whether by legislation, regulation or administrative action, to ensure compliance with the basic standards so as to enable the Commission to make appropriate recommendations. The main consequence of this is that any draft regulations on the right of the population to receive information on radiation hazards or on the intervention plan must be subject to the aforementioned procedure to ensure their compliance with the Directive in question.