

Background information for journalists

UNSCEAR's update assessment of the Fukushima-Daiichi accident

The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) has agreed during its 66th session (11–14 June 2018) to update its UNSCEAR 2013 Report¹ and to begin working on a new report (working title “Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station: Implications of information published since the 2013 UNSCEAR report”).

The Committee's role to assess the levels and effects of the radiation exposure in the event of a nuclear accident or radiological emergency and to disseminate findings to the United Nations General Assembly, the scientific community and the public is recognized in the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the International Organizations². According to this plan such an assessment may be indicated if an event occurs that involves numbers of serious overexposures or widespread contamination of water, land, people or commodities or is of significant concern to the United Nations General Assembly or the public.

The Committee assessed radiation exposures of the public, workers and non-human biota that resulted from the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station and reported its findings, including a discussion of the associated risks and effects, to the United Nations General Assembly in October 2013.³ and in a full UNSCEAR 2013 Report¹ in April 2014. The report set out the Committee's assessment of the levels of exposure of defined groups of the general public in Japan, including those evacuated and different age groups, and of workers. On the basis of this assessment, the Committee concluded that health risks resulting from the Fukushima accident were far lower than those for Chernobyl, due to the substantially lower doses received by the public and workers, and did not expect discernible increased incidences of radiation-related health effects among those exposed. However, most

¹ UNSCEAR. Sources, Effects and Risks of Ionizing Radiation. Volume I: Report to the General Assembly and Scientific Annex A. UNSCEAR 2013 Report. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. United Nations sales publication E.14.IX.1. United Nations, New York, 2014.

² IAEA. Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the International Organizations. EPR-JPLAN 2013. Emergency Preparedness and Response, International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna (2013)

³ Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 46 (A/68/46) with corrigendum.

of the scientific information used in the UNSCEAR 2013 Report was limited to that published or disclosed by the end of October 2012. Subsequently a significant amount of relevant information has been published and new information will continue to become available over coming years.

Three white papers^{4,5,6} have been published since the finalization of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report to set out evaluations of the implications of new scientific developments for the findings of the report for the period up to end of 2016. The results of these reviews of new information have generally confirmed the assumptions and findings of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report. The findings remain broadly robust within their inherent uncertainties. From a strictly scientific viewpoint, a full, formal update of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report, either in whole or part would not be warranted^{4,5,6}. Nevertheless, more extensive analyses of the new data and information could lead to differences in some of the precise details and findings of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report, and/or contribute to an improved understanding and communication of the underlying science and its implications within various constituencies (e.g., policy makers, public health officials, public and the media). More authoritative statements (with reduced uncertainty) could be made on a number of issues owing to the much more extensive information now available (e.g. on whether or not the observed increased incidence in thyroid cancer among young people can be attributed to radiation exposure from the accident).

The Committee aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the implications of the new information that has become available since its UNSCEAR 2013 Report and set out an authoritative and up-to-date assessment of the levels and effects of radiation exposure at the time of the tenth anniversary of the accident in 2021.

⁴ UNSCEAR. Developments since the 2013 UNSCEAR report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident following the Great East-Japan earthquake and tsunami. A 2015 white paper to guide the Scientific Committee's future programme of work. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. United Nations, New York, 2015.

⁵ UNSCEAR. Developments since the 2013 UNSCEAR report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident following the Great East-Japan earthquake and tsunami. A 2016 white paper to guide the Scientific Committee's future programme of work. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. United Nations, New York, 2016.

⁶ UNSCEAR. Developments since the 2013 UNSCEAR report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident following the Great East-Japan earthquake and tsunami. A 2017 white paper to guide the Scientific Committee's future programme of work. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. United Nations, New York, 2017.