

The Nuclear Action Plan

The mission to the Kara sea has been financed through the Nuclear Action Plan. Norwegian government's action plan for nuclear activities and the environment in northern areas is the most important management tool of the Norwegian authorities in their nuclear safety work with Russia. The overarching goal of the action plan is to protect health, the environment and business activity against radioactive contamination from the nuclear industry in Northwest Russia.

Longstanding cooperation

Norway's longstanding cooperation with Russia on nuclear safety is an important element of the bilateral relations between the two countries. As far back as in 1992, a group of experts was established under the Joint Norwegian-Russian Commission on Environmental Protection to carry out a survey of radioactive pollution in the northern sea areas. The Government's Nuclear Action Plan was launched in April 1995.

An important principle of this cooperation has been that the main responsibility for dealing with these issues lies with the Russians. The nature of the cooperation has gradually changed as the Russians have shown more commitment and become more actively engaged.

As a result of extensive civilian and military nuclear activity during the Cold War, large quantities of radioactive waste and nuclear material are stored under unsafe conditions in northwestern Russia. This poses a risk to Norway as well, in terms of health, the environment and other important public interests in the north. Poorly secured fissile material is also a threat in a security and non-proliferation perspective. Both operative facilities and ones that have been closed down pose problems.

The Norwegian efforts

The Norwegian efforts have two main objectives:

- to reduce the risk of serious accidents and pollution from nuclear facilities
- to prevent radioactive and fissile material from falling into the wrong hands.

Norway has provided assistance for the dismantling of decommissioned nuclear submarines and the handling of spent reactor fuel from submarines and nuclear icebreakers and other solid and liquid radioactive waste. In the years since this cooperation was established, Norway has gained greater knowledge of the environmental and safety challenges at Russian nuclear facilities. Cooperation between Norwegian and Russian inspection and administrative authorities has been expanded, and there is greater openness about the problems.

In recent years the annual allocations have been around NOK 86–100 million, and Norway's efforts have been focused on four main priority areas:

- dismantling of nuclear submarines decommissioned from the Northern Fleet (finished in 2009),
- replacement of radioisotope thermoelectric generators (RTGs) in lighthouses and beacons along the Arctic coast of northwestern Russia and along the Baltic (finished in 2011) coast using photovoltaic technology,
- infrastructure measures in preparation for measures to secure and remove the large quantities of spent nuclear fuel stored at the closed service base at Andreyev Bay, about 60 kilometers from the Norwegian border,
- cooperation between Norwegian and Russian inspection and administrative authorities.

For the Norwegian authorities it is important to ensure that all activities financed with Norwegian funding are based on risk and environmental impact assessments, in which both the possible consequences of the work to be performed and the consequences of any accidents have been thoroughly assessed. It is therefore a requirement that such assessments are carried out before Norwegian funding is provided and work is initiated.

International commitment

From the start, one of Norway's aims has been to mobilize stronger international commitment to resolving the nuclear challenges in northwestern Russia. A broad international commitment is crucial for resolving these numerous tasks, which will require considerable resources. Many countries are now participating in this work, and good coordination and collaboration arrangements have been put in place. Russia's own efforts have been intensified in recent years and are now quite comprehensive. This applies particularly to the dismantling of submarines, the upgrading of safety at nuclear power plants and the removal of RTGs from lighthouses. In addition, a number of Norwegian and international environmental NGOs have become involved and are making valuable contributions.