

# Lithuania

## *A Model of Success and a Willing Mentor*

When Lithuania emerged from the former Soviet Union in 1991, it faced a challenge common to other Eastern European countries: namely, that the mechanisms needed to support radiation protection were virtually non-existent. The regulatory system suffered from the lack of necessary facilities, equipment for regulatory activities and trained staff.



Mr. Albinas Mastauskas, director of Lithuania's Radiation Protection Center, credits the IAEA with helping his country identify needs and develop an action plan, which was implemented in 1995. A few years later, the country passed laws for radiation protection, environmental protection, nuclear energy, and radioactive waste management.

Safety in the nuclear energy sector is a particularly high priority for Lithuania: The Ignalina nuclear power plant produces 80% of the country's electricity. The Radiation Protection Center has a well-established radiation monitoring system, which includes environmental monitoring for radon — a naturally occurring radioactive gas that emanates from the ground into the air. Monitoring activities carried out in 1995–1998 identified some regions in which radon levels were higher than the national average. Since the gas is a risk factor associated with lung cancer, the homes, offices and public places in these regions are being carefully examined.

Linked to these initiatives is growing awareness that the Centre needs to improve communications regarding nuclear technology.

"Informing the public is a key part of our work and we are taking steps to bolster our public relations capabilities," says Mr. Mastauskas. This need came to the fore when a Russian fighter crashed in Lithuania in September 2005. "The public was demanding information as to the potential risks of depleted uranium surrounding the crash. They wanted to know: *What happened? Are we at risk? What are the authorities doing?*"

Mr. Mastauskas also encourages dialogue within the nuclear technology community. He hosts visitors from around the world, many from other small countries, who want to learn from Lithuania's experience. In each instance, Mr. Mastauskas emphasizes one particular need and one key message. "Without strong government support, the IAEA cannot render assistance. In a small country like Lithuania, collaboration is the key. We must work together," he says. "But you can never say you've finished; it's an ongoing process of problems and progress."

—Linda Lodding/Managing Editor