

Nuclear professionals share how to promote strong safety cultures: the IAEA's school on leadership for safety



Junior and mid-career professionals learn about safety leadership skills through group exercises at the IAEA's school on leadership for safety.

(Photo: J. Gil Martin/IAEA)

Leadership for nuclear safety and the development of a strong safety culture within organizations requires creating a space for open and meaningful discussions between nuclear professionals with different backgrounds, said participants of the School of Nuclear and Radiological Leadership for Safety, held in Ankara, Turkey from 22 April to 3 May 2019.

Safety leadership is particularly important in nuclear and radiological work environments, in both routine and emergency situations, owing to their inherent complexities. The IAEA's school on leadership for safety helps early- to mid-career nuclear and radiation professionals develop the skills they need to lead for safety throughout their careers.

A total of 29 professionals from regulatory bodies, nuclear operators and technical organizations from 14 countries participated in the course. They analysed case studies, conducted exercises, took part in discussions and listened to invited experts' presentations on nuclear and radiation safety, including emergency preparedness. The course was held in the framework of an IAEA technical cooperation project on enhancing capacity building activities in

European nuclear and radiation safety organizations for the safe operation of facilities.

Participants said the school provided an environment for discussions on building safety leadership and offered them inspiration and strategies for implementing such leadership at their institutions.

Introducing new ways to communicate within teams

School participant Milijana Steljic, Head of the International Cooperation and Project Management Unit at the Serbian Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate, highlighted the importance of personal behaviour and the use of certain tools to build strong teams for promoting safety.

"This course encouraged me to think in a new way, particularly of my role as a leader and how I balance my professional output with the ability to inspire my team members through my own actions," said Steljic. "Combining presentations and lectures with case studies, group work, games and technical visits, the school exposed our leadership behaviour and introduced us to a set of leaders' tools for us to use daily."

"I want to introduce team-building exercises and regular discussions of case studies into my team and use these new leaders' tools to evaluate my team's performance," she continued. "Ideally, I would like to introduce this idea to the entire organization, as I would like us all to have more open communication in order to build a strong safety culture in our organization."

Promoting a commitment to leadership among all team members

Another participant, Aysel Hasanova, Senior Advisor at the Department of Technical Legislation and Standards of Azerbaijan's State Agency for Regulation of Nuclear and Radiological Activity, emphasized the role of appropriate programmes in inspiring nuclear safety professionals and noted that all team members — not only managers — can be leaders for safety.

"Leaders' behaviours strongly impact safety. Leadership for safety means a continuous desire to develop and be a role model for all of one's team members, regardless of whether one is a manager or not," said Hasanova. "I work to promote a strong safety culture and the transfer of knowledge from experienced professionals, engaging younger professionals and professional women and I am committed to introducing new tools for human resources development across the country — which is why I opted to participate in this course."

"Previously, I thought you had to be born a leader, but I now believe everyone can uncover and develop their own leadership skills," she said. "Nothing is built in one day, but we need to start with clear goals and make a great commitment in order to achieve them."

—By *Nathalie Mikhailova*