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8 juillet 2018

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Source : NucNet

<https://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2018/07/06/commission-calls-for-safety-improvements-at-france-s-nuclear-power-stations>

Commission Calls For Safety Improvements At France's Nuclear Power Stations

6 Jul 2018 : Improvements are needed in the safety of France's nuclear power plants, including their ability to withstand a possible terrorist attack or aircraft crash, a French government commission has concluded.

The parliamentary commission, set up in January 2018 to look at the safety and security of nuclear installations in France, said in a report published on 5 July 2018 that the fleet of 58 commercial nuclear power units and other nuclear facilities including La Hague reprocessing plant remain vulnerable to accident and attack.

"French nuclear installations seem to suffer from an original flaw that will be difficult to remedy : they were not designed to withstand terrorist-like aggression," said the report.

The report identified several risks including plane crashes, drone incursions, internal sabotage, external intrusions and cyber attacks.

EDF said in a statement that safety has been its "priority right from the start" and it is committed to "a process of continuous improvement".

The company said the summary of the report "does not reveal any breach of the obligations incumbent on the operator".

According to the report, the NGO Greenpeace has, over the last 30 years, “conducted 14 intrusion attempts in order to demonstrate the vulnerability” of the French nuclear sites.

The commission put forward 33 suggestions to improve the situation - including reducing reliance on subcontractors, putting more police on the ground at nuclear sites, reconsidering waste disposal methods, being clearer on the timeline for shutting down plants and strengthening the powers of the French nuclear regulator, the ASN.

The report said France’s Cigeo deep geologic repository project in Bure, northeastern France, has “certain vulnerabilities” including the risk of an underground fire that cannot be contained.

The report highlighted the risks associated with outsourcing in the nuclear industry, noting that 80% of tasks, both for operation and maintenance, are outsourced to contractors. This leads to a loss of competence within EDF and “poses a problem in a sector where it is necessary to reduce the risk to a minimum”.

EDF said the commission, made up of both pro- and anti-nuclear members, had questioned several of its executives who had responded under oath to more than 150 questions. Around 60 additional questions were sent to EDF in writing and answered in detail. Around 2,000 pages of documents were sent to the commission, EDF said.

Three days of visits were organised to the Gravelines, Tricastin and the Flamanville-3 nuclear sites.

The commission’s report is online (French only) : <https://bit.ly/2IYoswf>



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