

N3433. FRANCE MAY BAN TEMPORARY WORKERS FROM RADIATION WORK AT EDF PLANTS

A proposal by the French administration to prohibit the use of temporary and limited-contract workers in controlled (radioactive) zones was revealed late last month.

The news coincided with the signing by Electricite de France (EDF), and representatives of six maintenance contractor associations of a "Charter of Progress" under which both sides pledge improvements in reactor maintenance contracting.

The ministry estimates that the ban, if implemented, would affect some 3,160 people. Although that is less than 10% of the people employed in radiation zone work at French nuclear installations, labor union leaders have charged that workers with "precarious" contracts have been among those receiving the highest doses in years past. Unions fear that employers use temporary and limited-duration contracts to "manage labor by dose," i.e., that workers who are close to statutory dose limits simply do not see their contracts renewed and can no longer find employment.

A major point of the charter is EDF's commitment to award maintenance contracts based on the "best bid," not the lowest one, taking into account technical quality criteria such as employee training and a company's collective exposure commitments and results.

Statistics provided by EDF indicate rapid and impressive progress in radiation protection over the past few years. The annual average dose per PWR has dropped from 2.44 man-Sievert (244 person-rem) in 1991 to 2.04 man-Sv in 1993 - the last year of manual inspection of reactor vessel heads - and to 1.74, 1.63, and 1.59 man-Sv respectively over the past three years. The number of workers receiving more than 20 milliSievert (2 rem) over 12 months was 982 in 1993, 766 in 1994, and 555 in 1995. The utility is aiming to reduce that number to zero in 2000, in time to meet standards set by the European Union in a new radiation protection directive approved last year.

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