

# IRSN, the French national public expert in nuclear and radiological risks

## Key figures

194 advice notices and reports published on [www.irsn.fr](http://www.irsn.fr) in 2020

**104** responses to requests from local information committees (CLIs) and associations in 2020

**11** IRSN technical presentations to CLIs in 2020

**240** scientific papers published annually in peer-reviewed journals, on average

## The right for the public to know and to participate: a right enshrined in law

### At international level

- The Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. It was signed on June 25, 1998 by 39 countries, including France.

### At national level

- French Law no. 2006-686 of June 13, 2006 on transparency and security in the nuclear field, known as the "TSN Law".
- French Law of August 17, 2015 on the energy transition for green growth, known as the "TECV Law".

## IRSN FACT SHEETS

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[www.irsn.fr](http://www.irsn.fr)

Taking into account safety and radiation protection issues related to major nuclear projects and, more generally, the use of ionizing radiation, at a time when environmental democracy is gaining ground, civil society claims more transparency and wants to actively participate in risk assessment upstream of political decision-making, thus contributing, through citizen vigilance, to managing these risks.

### Transparency and dialog: two requirements included in IRSN's identity

Given that nuclear and radiation risks, although they are assessed and managed according to defined procedures, nevertheless concern society as a whole, IRSN has focused on developing a policy of openness to society as early as 2003.

This is one of the four strategic areas for progress included in the 2019–2023 Objectives and Performance Contract linking the Institute to the French government. With a view to establishing a proactive policy in this area, the Institute created a dedicated unit in 2006 and adopted a Charter on openness to society in 2009.

In 2020, the *IRSN Barometer on the perception of risks and security by the French* continued to highlight strong public expectations in terms of transparency and information from nuclear stakeholders as well as in terms of citizen participation. 71% of French people consider that expert bodies making their reports public is a priority and 89% point out the need for "clear information on the risks of facilities readily available". Regarding their expectations in terms of participation, 92% said that pluralist structures are useful, mainly to "better identify risks" and "help reduce risks".

To meet this expectation, IRSN turns its willingness for transparency into action by posting its advice notices, reports, work, and scientific papers on its website, thus allowing any citizen to access its work on nuclear and radiological risk assessment.

Furthermore, the Institute strives, year after year, to respond to questions and requests from local information committees (CLI) and associations by sharing its knowledge on nuclear safety, environmental monitoring, and the health of populations and workers, in particular for major issues, through open and sustainable technical dialog initiatives. These regular interactions promote the involvement of civil society on technical topics relating to nuclear and radiological risks. These dialog initiatives offer the Institute the opportunity to consider the growing questioning of society.

For IRSN, this interaction with civil society contributes to its independent and unbiased expert assessment and research work.

### IRSN's commitments to openness to society

IRSN's policy on openness to society is based on a Charter published in 2009 and structured around six commitments.

The first three commitments aim to improve risk assessment through a strengthened dialog with society: increase the transparency of IRSN's work; share its knowledge; help civil society stakeholders in acquiring the skills necessary to actively participate and build the risk assessment with their contribution.

The following three are focused on the effective implementation of openness to society: enhance the ability of the Institute's staff to interact with civil society stakeholders; identify and mobilize resources necessary to further stakeholders' involvement; carry out an internal policy on openness strategy, and publicly report on progress achieved as well as problems encountered.

After ten years of implementation of the Policy of Openness to Society, IRSN reviewed the insights.

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IRSN is a French State-owned industrial and commercial establishment (EPIC) the missions, status, and operation of which are determined by Articles L592-45 to L592-49 and R592-39 to R592-61 of the French Environment Code. IRSN is under the joint supervision of the French Minister for the Environment, the French the Minister of Defense, and the French Ministers of Energy, Research, and Health.

As a public expert, IRSN advances scientific knowledge to manage all nuclear and radiation risks. Through its research, methods, and interactions with all stakeholders, IRSN assesses these risks and their consequences independently. It thus contributes to their prevention, detection, and the limitation of their possible effects, in order to protect the population and the environment.

## 2019, IRSN reviews its ten years of commitment

This review is one of the actions carried out by IRSN's women and men who commit daily to make the Institute a society oriented organization. It points out that a sustainable and productive dialog between the Institute and society has really been established.

This openness policy directly involves IRSN's experts and "field" researchers with a view to bringing mutual benefits. As such, citizen involvement also feeds expertise and research by providing different points of view. This is the case, for example, in the following areas:

- contributions of questions from the public to technical dialog sessions, organized in partnership with Anccli (National Association of Local information Committees and Commissions), in particular on the fourth periodic review of 900 MWe reactors, the radioactive waste storage project, the public debate on the fifth French national radioactive materials and waste management plan (PNGMDR), as well as on other subjects, such as the EPR vessel,
- the development of participatory science projects, such as OpenRadiation, allowing access to and the sharing of citizen measurements of radioactivity in the environment,
- implementation of pluralist territorial initiatives relating, in particular, to the management of radon risks in private housing with the active involvement of individuals, regional authorities and administrations, and building professionals,
- the dissemination among young people of a practical radiation protection culture, in particular through radiation protection workshops in high schools, annual international meetings involving French and foreign high school students and teachers, as well as radiation protection experts.

This type of coordinated actions:

- is part of the "sharing" value expressed in the IRSN document "Ambitions & Strategy 2030";
- helps improve everyone's vigilance regarding nuclear safety and radiation protection issues;
- allows us to build a relationship of mutual contribution, beneficial to all.

## 2020, the inter-agency Charter on openness to society includes new members

In 2009, IRSN, the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety (Anses), the French Institute of Science and Technology for Transport, Development, and Networks (Ifsttar), the French National Institute for Industrial Environment and Risks (Ineris), and the National Research Institute of Science and Technology for Environment and Agriculture (Irstea) signed the inter-agency Charter on openness to society. They were joined in 2016 by the French geological survey - Frances's reference public institution for Earth science application - (BRGM), and the National Public Health Agency (Santé PubliqueFrance), then, in 2020, by the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (Ifremer) and, as part of the respective reorganization, the National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (Inrae), and the Gustave Eiffel University. Through their activities of scientific and technical research, and assessment, these eight public bodies share the same values of independence, transparency, and scientific quality of their work, as well as the goal of providing better understanding of the risks and the means to prevent and reduce them.

## Prospects for opening up to society at IRSN

IRSN's review of its ten years of commitment to openness to society highlighted the need to mobilize and broaden stakeholder networks in order to take up the challenge of civil society participation in risk assessment. Based on this observation, the Institute set up new interaction and dialog mechanisms meant to involve new stakeholders, and to create innovative spaces for pluralist dialogs.

Within this framework, IRSN set up a new Committee for openness and dialog with civil society on expertise (ODISCE). Drawing on existing committees for dialog in other public bodies in charge of risk assessment, this pluralist representation committee will include, in particular, manufacturers, elected people, stakeholder and administration representatives, as well as IRSN experts. Its role will be to advise the Institute on how to introduce new forms of dialog in nuclear and radiation risk assessment.

Regarding research, IRSN will continue to deploy participatory research projects with a view to testing various methodological approaches in the fields of health and environment. In particular, the idea is to lay the consolidated basis for future territorial projects in the area of participatory research on multiple exposure to environmental stressors, by involving researchers and civil society representatives.