

## French nuclear industry : Repeated incidents and legal action.

The Tricastin site is a major part of the nuclear industry, with more than 5,000 employees and many sub-contracting companies. It includes the military research facility of Pierrelatte, the EDF (French Electricity, the public company operating the power plants) power plant, COMURHEX a factory for converting natural uranium, and EURODIF a uranium enrichment factory. The latter two are subsidiaries of AREVA. Socatri is itself a sub-contractor of EURODIF.

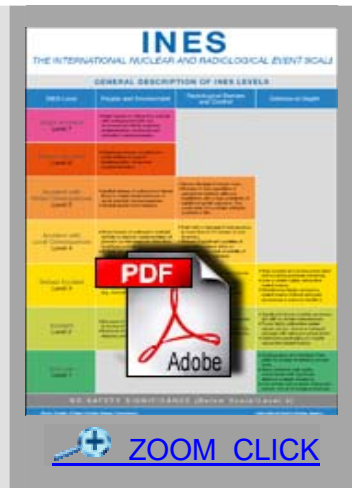
France's nuclear industry is among the most advanced in the world, providing nearly 80 percent of electric power in France, and AREVA realized a business in 2007 of € 5.373 billion or \$ 8.36 billion.

[In the night of July 7-8, the Tricastin nuclear site](#) (in south-eastern France's Drôme region) leaked 30 cubic meters of uranium-rich water. The spillage was partly on the grounds of the plant, which specialises in sanitizing and recycling low-radioactivity nuclear waste, and partly outside of the site.

In its statements on the incident, SOCATRI (the AREVA subsidiary operating the plant) specified only the mass of uranium released - first it was reported that 360 kg were shed, then it was 224 kg of which, "only" 74 kg had been released outside the site - and the level at which the incident was classified on the International Atomic Energy Agency's International Nuclear Events Scale (INES). The incident was classified as level 1 on a scale of 0 ("simple deviation") to 7 ("major accident")

[Legal action being Next-up organization against the ASN](#) (Authority for Nuclear Safety) is a classification of INES level. Interest to act : The non-ionizing and ionizing radiations are electromagnetic fields (EMF).

The INES classification by itself appears highly dubious: as soon as contamination occurs outside the nuclear site, the INES requires that the incident receive a minimum classification of level 3.



This information is not enough to assess the gravity of the incident: Socatri gave only the quantity of uranium shed, while the relevant measure is the level of radiation, expressed in Becquerels. This omission was clearly due to the wish to avoid panic: even if only 74 kg of natural.

The official chronology is also unclear. The leak allegedly occurred on July 7 at 23.30 p.m. ASN and the local representatives of the government were informed at 7.30 a.m. and the mayor of the nearest town (Lamotte du Rhône) at 1.30 p.m., then the population and media at 4 p.m.

The inspection ordered by the [Nuclear Safety Authority \(ASN\) with an initial release on July 09](#), and the SOCATRI's CEO was subsequently fired.

State officials attempted to downplay the incident. The Minister of Ecology, Jean-Louis Borloo, noted there had been 86 level 1 "anomalies" in 2007 and 114 in 2006. The enquiry on the July 7 incident also detected water table pollution, apparently linked to the storage of military nuclear waste at Pierrelatte. Due to the feelings provoked by the first incident, it was decided to test the water tables around all 58 French nuclear power plants.

In the following weeks, there were other incidents, receiving less coverage particular [on July 17, another leak was detected at the FBFC factory at Romans-sur-Isère](#) (also in the Drôme), caused by a pipe break dating back several years.

In the July 19 edition of the *Journal du Dimanche*, Anne Lauvergeon (executive board AREVA) asserted that the handling of the incident was "the proof of a transparent industry." She then declared, "the incident is over." In a telephone interview for the Associated Press, Luis Echavarri, head of the Nuclear Energy Agency, declared, "You can't expect perfection from any industry." He called the Tricastin incident "negligible" and said there would be no negative impact on public opinion ! .