



Ukraine

Greenpeace warns over safety of Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant

International regulators unable to properly monitor Russian-held site, says dossier sent to western leaders

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International regulators are incapable of properly monitoring safety at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, according to [a critical dossier](#) compiled by Greenpeace that is being sent to western governments on Thursday.

The environmental campaign group concludes the International Atomic [Energy](#) Agency has too few inspectors at Europe's biggest nuclear plant - four - and that there are too many restrictions placed on their access.

It argues that the IAEA is "unable to meet its mandate requirements" but it is not prepared to admit as much in public, and as a result what it describes as Russian violations of safety principles are not being called out.

Shaun Burnie and Jan Vande Putte, nuclear specialists at [Greenpeace](#), conclude: “The IAEA risks normalising what remains a dangerous nuclear crisis, unprecedented in the history of nuclear power, while exaggerating its actual influence on events on the ground.”

The vast Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, with six reactors on site, was captured by Russia in early March 2022 and has been on the frontline of the war ever since. It is sited on the Dnipro River in central [Ukraine](#) and Ukrainian forces occupy the riverbank opposite, leaving the plant in the sights of both sides’ militaries.

Russian forces have based themselves inside the plant, potentially numbering 500-600 based on reports from early in the war. Imagery from 2022 revealed some armoured vehicles present. At times it has come under attack, including in August 2022 when shelling blew holes in the roof of a storage unit.

The IAEA declined to comment directly on the Greenpeace report but highlighted that it had had inspectors on site since September 2022, and that without their presence “the world would have no independent source of information about Europe’s largest nuclear power plant”.

All six of its reactors are in shutdown, and concerns about whether there was enough water available for cooling after the dam at Nova Kakhovka downstream was breached in June have been eased by the [drilling of new wells](#), according to the IAEA.

But anxieties remain about the potential for a fresh outbreak of fighting at the plant, as Ukraine seeks to regain territory in its counteroffensive.

Greenpeace’s conclusions are supplemented by an open-source military assessment, written by McKenzie Intelligence. Most of the Russian troops and defences on the site are likely to be concealed, and inspectors report evidence that some areas of the plant have been mined, though it is unclear how heavily.

But relying on satellite imagery, the analysts said there was evidence that the occupiers had built sangar firing points on the roof of four of the reactor halls. Track marks, also revealed from above, demonstrate that Russia routinely fires Grad or Smerch rocket launchers at Ukrainian targets from various sites between 1km and 18km away from the plant.

The Russian military is also likely “to be using the proximity of the nuclear power plant as a shield” to deter counter-battery fire, Burnie and Vande Putte write, a breach, they argue, of the IAEA’s five safety principles first announced by its director general, Rafael Grossi, at the [UN security council in May](#).

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Grossi told members of the UN body that he had identified five core safety principles relating to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, including that “there should be no attack of any kind from or against the plant” and that it “should not be used as storage or a base for heavy weapons”.

The Greenpeace authors argue that, five months later, there has been “no significant reporting by the IAEA DG [director general] on the compliance or non-compliance by Russia forces or Ukraine” - and raise concerns about the level of access the on-site inspectors have around the plant.

An [IAEA report in September](#) noted that while inspectors were able to conduct independent verifications at the nuclear site, “some areas of the plant, such as reactor building rooftops or turbine halls, remained inaccessible ... for long periods”. Russian managers requested inspectors give one week’s notice of all access requests, it added.

Such statements, Greenpeace said, demonstrated that the IAEA could not confirm compliance because of “Russian obstruction” - and accused the global nuclear inspectorate, which has 177 member countries including Russia and Ukraine, of “taking its commitment to neutrality too far”.

Copies of the Greenpeace dossier were submitted on Wednesday night, before publication, to a number of the IAEA’s international board of governors. They include representatives of the US, UK, France and Germany. It is understood Greenpeace has also held discussions with Ukraine about the situation at the plant.

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