

# COUNTERING RADIOLOGICAL & NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION: NARRATIVES, RISKS AND RESPONSES



GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA GC)

**BRIEFING NOTE | SEPTEMBER 2025**

Disinformation by state-sponsored and state-adjacent actors has been observed in multilateral chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) forums, including the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

**Disinformation will likely feature at the IAEA GC.** To help prepare delegations for disinformation narratives they may encounter, the *GP WMD Counter Disinfo Initiative* has analysed past disinformation cases and identified common narratives and their characteristics. Further information can be found at [www.GPWMDCounterDisinfo.com](http://www.GPWMDCounterDisinfo.com).

## WHAT IS RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR (RN) DISINFORMATION?

It is the deliberate spread of false or misleading information about nuclear weapons, peaceful nuclear applications (such as nuclear energy), or radiological materials. Disinformation is differentiated from misinformation by its intent to mislead, although this intent is often difficult to establish with certainty.

## WHY IT MATTERS

RN disinformation can directly undermine the IAEA's ability to deliver on its mandate by delegitimising the sources of its authority: impartiality, technical expertise and international credibility. When the IAEA is portrayed as biased or ineffective, trust is eroded, which can lead to reduced political support and financial contributions by Member States. Constraining IAEA capacity could destabilise the institution's key roles in deterring proliferation and ensuring nuclear safety, security and peaceful cooperation.

## HOW RN DISINFORMATION WORKS

RN disinformation taps into powerful psychological drivers. Radiation is widely perceived as a uniquely alarming threat, making audiences highly sensitive to distressing claims. Complex technical issues provide a high barrier to understanding and are often simplified into good-versus-evil narratives. Allegations linked to nationality, alliances or ideology also resonate strongly and deepen polarisation. Follow the link to learn more about [CBRN disinformation tactics](#).

## HOW DISINFORMATION CAN ERODE THE IAEA'S CREDIBILITY

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|---|--|
|  <p>Impartiality framed as political alignment</p>   | <p><b>Actors exploit:</b> The IAEA's obligation to remain impartial and base conclusions only on verifiable evidence.</p> <p><b>Disinformation approach:</b> Neutrality is reframed as political alignment with dominant powers or selective blindness to violations.</p>                                    |
|  <p>Scientific due diligence framed as cover-ups</p> | <p><b>Actors exploit:</b> The time required for IAEA inspections, verification and technical assessment.</p> <p><b>Disinformation approach:</b> Slow, deliberate processes and probabilistic language are presented as deliberate concealment or collusion.</p>  |
|  <p>Mandate constraints framed as inaction</p>       | <p><b>Actors exploit:</b> The IAEA's lack of authority to attribute blame for incidents and its requirement to use precise, consensus-driven communication.</p> <p><b>Disinformation approach:</b> Scope limitations are portrayed as unwillingness to act, lack of relevance or institutional weakness.</p> |

## PREVIOUSLY OBSERVED DISINFORMATION VEHICLES

- **Plenary statements and notes verbale:** insertion of misleading claims into official records.
- **Working papers:** technical distortions in draft documents and non-papers.
- **Bilateral meetings:** direct advocacy with skewed or falsified information.
- **Corridor diplomacy:** informal rumours among delegations and staff.

## WHAT DELEGATES CAN DO TO MINIMISE DISINFORMATION IMPACTS



### Spot & Check

Watch for potentially false narratives and quietly verify with trusted technical experts and sources (e.g. safeguards implementation reports).



### Escalate & Coordinate

If deemed significant, coordinate with your capital, the IAEA Secretariat's Communications Office and trusted third parties, including experts.



### Select Response

Assess whether the narrative is strategically significant and spreading widely enough to warrant a response (engagement could amplify the falsehood).



### Debunk

If the decision to respond is made, use factual language to reassert the IAEA's mandate and support individuals (inspectors, officials) if personally targeted.

## LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONAL COUNTERMEASURES



### Awareness

Encourage topical training on rad/nuke content for delegations and staff, and support scenario-based exercises to enhance analytic rigor.



### Monitoring

Build monitoring capacity to track disinformation trends and ensure staff have access to relevant OSINT and digital analysis tools.



### Assessment

Define clear response thresholds that establish when and how action should be taken, ensuring rapid and credible debunking.



### Response

Prepare adaptable, pre-approved messaging templates that combine verified facts with accessible language for diverse audiences.

*Learn more about specific radiological and nuclear disinformation narratives*



Dirty bombs and nuclear escalation threats



Allegations of Ukrainian nuclear rearmament



Weaponisation of nuclear power plants