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PAPER TITLE Is Ionising Radiation a fact of life?

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ABSTRACT (See instructions overleaf)

Everyone attending the IRPA meeting will give a simple answer: YES

All of us know that natural ionising radiation arises in outer space, where cosmic rays are formed, and in earth, where radionuclides normally present in soil, air, water, food and even our bodies undergo radioactive decay.

How many among the "general public" know that radioactivity is the natural phenomenon of disintegration accompanied by the emission of ionising radiation? How much has been done to teach the population that penetrating radiation (gamma rays, alpha and beta particles, neutrons and muons) and radioactive material pervade the natural environment. And that exposure occurs by irradiation from sources outside the body and upon the decay of radionuclides taken into the body through ingestion and inhalation. Very little.

Even today, a hundred years after humankind learned about ionising radiation and radioactivity, the subject is not addressed at any stage in either primary and secondary schools world wide. One can not forget that an effort has been done, may be biased to gain public acceptance, by the nuclear industry to produce leaflets, brochures, teaching aids, even comics aimed to child and adolescent understanding but because there is not national curriculum requirement their impact is small.

If we agree that ionising radiation is a fact of life, it has to be thought as such in primary and secondary schooling. Then it is time to start some action to encourage the education authorities to introduce radiation and radiation protection in primary and secondary schools curricula in our own countries.