

Fifty years of nuclear safeguards

November 1, 2016



In December of 1953, after the world became aware of the tremendous power and threat that coexisted with atomic weapons and technology, President Eisenhower presented his “Atoms for Peace” speech to the United Nations. While there has been discussion about whether his efforts propelled or dampened the nuclear arms race, he directly addressed the need for an international agency to encourage the positive uses of atomic energy. His speech included the following thoughts on the subject:

The more important responsibility of this atomic energy agency would be to devise methods whereby . . . fissionable material would be allocated to serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind. Experts would be mobilized to apply atomic energy to the needs of agriculture, medicine and other peaceful activities. A special purpose would be to provide abundant electrical energy in the power-starved areas of the world.

The international agency Eisenhower was calling for—the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—was founded in 1957 through a collaboration of several nations. In the 50 years since, a strong relationship has formed between the agency and the Lab, with the Lab supporting nonproliferation and the monitoring of radioactive materials by developing new measurement equipment. The Laboratory also trains all IAEA inspectors.

A new Museum exhibit about the Lab and the IAEA includes historical background, examples of monitoring equipment, short videos, and even a Jeopardy-style quiz that awards points for correct answers.

This long-term display opened in October.

If you drop by to see this exhibit, be sure also to see our new exhibit on data visualization, which you will find in our Tech Lab.

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