

Welcome to nuclear inspector school

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You have no doubt heard news reports about nuclear inspectors traveling to a country to examine its use of nuclear materials. Even the imaginary Springfield Nuclear Power Plant in the animated television series “The Simpsons” has been subjected to surprise visits from nuclear inspectors.

What you might not know is that these inspectors’ mission stems from a proposal that President Dwight D. Eisenhower put forth to the United Nations General Assembly in 1953, when he called for the creation of an international organization to regulate and promote the peaceful use of nuclear power.

Four years later, Ike’s vision became reality with the formation of the International Atomic Energy Agency, more commonly known as the IAEA. The IAEA works with its member states and multiple partners worldwide to promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology. The IAEA also works to inhibit the use of civilian nuclear materials for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.

One of the IAEA’s principal missions focuses on safeguards to deter the spread of nuclear weapons by early detection of the misuse of nuclear materials or technology. These safeguards ensure that countries can use nuclear material and technologies for peaceful purposes, while the IAEA provides credible assurance to the world that the nuclear facilities are not misused and nuclear material is not diverted.

Inspectors go through training at Los Alamos National Laboratory, in one of the Laboratory’s nuclear facilities, as part of their requirements to become qualified inspectors. The reason is simple: Los Alamos has been doing this work for a long time and, consequently, is home to abundant expertise in all things nuclear.

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