

Nuclear: no solution to climate change

The new catch-cry of the nuclear industry is that nuclear energy is the answer to global climate change. Nuclear energy is toxic and dangerous. Far from being rehabilitated, the nuclear option is a convenient distraction from the problem of climate change and stalls real action to combat it.

Nuclear power lobbyists are correct that climate change demands an urgent and quick response. But replacing polluting coal power with another environmental disaster -- in the form of nuclear power -- is not the answer we need. Our best long-term solution for an emission free and greenhouse friendly future are the truly clean and green renewable energy sources -- particularly wind and solar -- combined with technologies that vastly improve energy efficiency.

There are valid reasons for the nuclear industry's longstanding decline in Europe and the USA:

Cost: Nuclear power is more expensive than fossil fuel generation, and is also more expensive than clean, renewable wind power. Costs associated with: safety and security, insurance and liability in case of accident or attack, waste management, construction and decommissioning; are rising substantially for nuclear power, whilst the cost of wind and solar power is falling.¹ Nuclear power plants have only presented a veneer of economic viability in the past due to heavy government subsidies.

Waste: Nuclear waste disposal is still an unsolved problem. The most dangerous form of pollution ever created, nuclear waste remains radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. Monitoring and maintaining waste deposits over a period spanning 20 times the length of known civilisation is an unacceptable burden we are placing on all future generations -- with no guarantees of long term safety.

Nuclear proliferation: Nuclear technology, such as uranium enrichment is also used in nuclear weapons production, and therefore a proliferation risk. There are now more than 40 countries with the capacity to build nuclear weapons, and international efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology are failing. Nuclear technology will always carry the risk that it will be used to construct weapons of mass destruction.

Greenhouse polluters: Claims that nuclear power is "emissions free" are false. Mining, extracting, processing, and transporting nuclear fuel produces emissions at every point. Even decommissioning mothballed reactors generates greenhouse emissions because of the machinery and transport involved.

Safe, clean alternatives

Despite having received only 5% the government support that nuclear power has received worldwide², renewable energy is experiencing an explosion of growth. Globally, solar photovoltaics have expanded by about 40% annually over the past three years, while wind energy grew by 20% in 2004. The increasing popularity of these technologies comes because they are safe, increasingly affordable and environmentally friendly.

Renewable energy and energy efficiency -- not nuclear power -- are the most viable alternatives to polluting coal power and climate protection.

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¹In the last 10 years cost per KWHr of wind energy fell by 50% and solar energy from photovoltaics fell by 30%. US Nuclear Energy Agency report on climate technology <http://www.nea.fr/html/ndd/climate/acting.html>

² Scheer, H (2004) WRCE Update http://www.world-council-for-renewable-energy.org/downloads/WCRE_Update_190904.pdf