
GREENS OPPOSE NEW PUSH FOR NUCLEAR POWER

The Green Party of the United States' Eco-Action Committee calls on all Americans to reject the reckless proposals for new nuclear power plants and associated uranium mining and milling processes which both President-elect Barack Obama and Senator John McCain supported in the recent presidential debates. Such nuclear agendas pose enormous and unacceptable health and environmental risks, and would be fiscally irresponsible in the extreme.

All of the processes associated with nuclear power are dangerous, from the mining of uranium to the transportation and disposal of the radioactive waste. Uranium mining is implicated in endocrine disorders and cancers among people working in or living near the mines, and clusters of childhood leukemia and other forms of cancer have been found in people living near nuclear power sites – even when the plants have not had a major accident. (The number of "minor" accidents, which the Nuclear Regulatory Commission calls "events," is staggering.)

Dr. Helen Caldicott, a physician who has devoted much of her life to researching the effects of the nuclear power&weapons industry on human health, lists some of the specific effects of the various carcinogenic elements associated with nuclear plants and with uranium mining: iodine-131 - thyroid cancer; strontium-90 - breast cancer, bone cancer, and leukemia; cesium-137 – sarcoma (malignant muscle cancer); plutonium-239 - liver cancer, bone cancer, testicular cancer, lung cancer, and birth defects.

More nuclear plants would also increase the risk of accidents and terrorism. Japan has experienced deaths at its new reprocessing plant in Rokkoshō, and the Mayak reprocessing plant in Russia has a long history of accidents, including one which killed at least 200 people and exposed hundreds of thousands of people to radiation. These, and the thousands of deaths, evacuation of 400,000 people, and devastation left by Chernobyl's meltdown, and the 15-year, billion dollar attempt to clean up the catastrophe at Three Mile Island are sobering cautions.

Radioactive waste produced by nuclear power plants will remain toxic to humans for more than 100,000 years. There is no way to store this waste safely. Already, all six of the "low-level" nuclear waste dumps in the U.S. have leaked.

The plain fact is, there are no technological quick fixes that can effectively isolate nuclear waste from the biosphere for the durations of its hazardous life. Therefore, rather than producing more of this waste, it is essential that the generation of nuclear wastes be halted.

The enormous and long-lasting health and environmental dangers alone make nuclear power unfeasible. Cost in dollars is another huge factor, with each new nuclear power plant expected to cost at least nine billion dollars. Amory Lovins, one of the nation's foremost energy-policy analysts, argues that of all the low-to-no carbon alternatives to coal, nuclear energy is the least cost effective.

In a recent paper, "Forget Nuclear," Lovins states that nuclear energy costs twice as much per kilowatt hour to produce as wind and at least seven times the cost of implementing end-use efficiency technologies. He estimates that efficiency alone could reduce energy consumption by three times nuclear power's market share, and that wind power alone could double the nation's electricity output.

Because of the high risks and high costs involved in building and maintaining nuclear power plants and monitoring the waste generated, the nuclear power industry has taxpayers subsidize nuclear plants. In 2005, taxpayer subsidies to the industry were raised to 60-90% of the entire projected cost of nuclear projects. Yet, due to regulatory changes made in the 1990s in anticipation of this new push for nuclear power, taxpayers have little say over the licensing of nuclear plants.

Rather than building more nuclear power plants, the Green Party of the United States calls for a moratorium on new nuclear power plants, the early retirement of nuclear power reactors, and the phase-out of technologies that use or produce nuclear waste, such as nuclear waste incinerators, food irradiators, and all commercial and military uses of depleted uranium. We also oppose the export of nuclear technologies or their wastes to other nations.

It is possible to achieve energy independence and more effectively address climate change through the strategic use of alternative energies such as wind and solar, and through increased efficiency and conservation, and to reduce energy consumption by 50% in 20 years. Greens also call for taking great care to minimize any negative environmental impacts, even from such "clean" technologies as wind and solar.

Nuclear power is as inimical to humans and the web of life on Earth as it has ever been. If the nuclear agenda both major parties are promoting is allowed to go forward, our continent will be poisoned by radioactivity for hundreds of generations into the future. We have a grave responsibility to ourselves and the future to reject nuclear power as any part of a sane solution to our energy crisis.
