

The Energy Spectator

Renewed Interest in Nuclear Power

Undervalued far too long, it may challenge “renewables” in the energy policy debate.

By Gene J. Koprowski – 7.29.15

Environmental activists privilege “renewable” power sources, such as wind and solar, and proclaim they can promptly reduce the West’s reliance on fossil fuels. But a new report on the economic and environmental contributions of nuclear power to the United States may help shift the debate.

As consumers in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and even some U.S. states are fast finding out, renewable power is far more costly than other alternatives. Governments’ decrees to adopt green technologies drive many on fixed incomes into energy poverty, a scary scenario in which the poor or the elderly have to choose between eating and heating their homes during the harsh winter months.

A scientifically and financially sound form of alternative energy—nuclear power—gets little support from environmentalists. Helping to bring nuclear power back to the energy policy discussion, however, is a new study by the Brattle Group, an economic consulting firm with 250 employees and offices in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., and six other locales around the world.

American nuclear energy plants contribute \$60 billion annually to the U.S. gross domestic product, according to the Brattle report. Even while operating in a constrained regulatory environment for decades, the U.S. nuclear industry accounts for nearly 475,000 full-time jobs, and nuclear energy provides almost 20 percent of the nation’s electricity.

In addition, energy generated from nuclear plants “prevents 573 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions,” the Brattle economists state. The report also notes nuclear power has a very small carbon footprint, a favorite metric touted by the Obama administration. For those concerned about carbon emissions, the generation of carbon-free electricity from nuclear power plants should be a high priority today, the authors say.

“The economic and environmental benefits of nuclear energy are often undervalued in national and state energy policy discussions,” said Dr. Mark Berkman, coauthor of the report and a principal at the Brattle Group.

Other findings of the report include the following:

- Nuclear energy helps keep electricity prices low. Without it, retail electricity rates could increase by approximately 6 percent per year. Keeping electricity prices low is the primary means by which nuclear power boosts the economy.
- Nuclear power plants provide \$10 billion in federal tax revenue and \$2.2 billion in state tax revenue annually.

- Nuclear energy reduces the nation's nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions by replacing other sources of power generation, such as coal.

All these factors indicate that halting the growth of nuclear power in the U.S. energy mix has cost the nation untold billions of dollars.

Even the Japanese, who endured the Fukushima nuclear power accident caused by a historic tsunami in 2011, are planning to bring 21 nuclear power plants online, according to a news report.

“Kyushu Electric Power Company plans to apply to regulators for the final ‘applied safety inspection’ of Sendai 1 on 3 August. This check is expected to take one week, making 10 August a potential start-up date,” says a report in the *World Nuclear News*, a daily energy industry periodical. “The Sendai 1 nuclear power reactor is being readied for restart with fuel already loaded, and tests on main systems underway. Sendai 1 should become the first Japanese reactor to generate power in almost two years.”

Other economic rivals of the United States, including the Chinese and the North Koreans, are also moving forward with nuclear power plans.

Why the United States has stayed on the sidelines since the Three Mile Island incident in the 1970s is attributable in great part to anti-nuclear activists' scare tactics, which have intimidated politicians. That may be about to change. *A recent report in National Geographic* indicates environmentally concerned figures, such as Bill Gates, are backing “next-gen” nuclear power plants as a key to reviving the industry in the United States.

With President Barack Obama diverted, at least for the next few months, to Iranian nuclear power issues rather than U.S. domestic energy debates, the environment is a lot friendlier for nuclear power plant proposals than it has been in a long time.

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