

Minute on Nuclear Energy

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As Friends, we strive to integrate into our beliefs and practices the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the Earth's ecological integrity. In harmony with these beliefs and practices we are deeply concerned about climate change and are seeking ways to reverse it. We encourage Friends and others to examine their ecological footprint.

There has been recent pressure to increase the use of nuclear energy based upon the argument that nuclear energy does not produce greenhouse gases, which lead to climate change. For the following moral, spiritual, and practical reasons we oppose increasing nuclear power generation and also urge that existing nuclear power plants be phased out as soon as possible.

Nuclear power generation is not and cannot be safe. Radioactive waste from nuclear power will be lethal, carcinogenic, and mutagenic to humans and all species for hundreds of thousands of years, leaking into water, soil, and atmosphere. Although the probability for an accident is low for any one plant in any year, the ultimate risk of an accident with radioactive contamination is high, and will increase if more nuclear power plants are constructed. Safe storage of radioactive wastes remains an unsolved problem. To consign future generations and ecosystems to this toxic legacy is morally untenable and contrary to Quaker principles.

Nuclear power generation also contributes to climate change. When the complete cycle of nuclear power is measured, including not only the construction of nuclear power plants, but also mining, milling, enrichment of uranium, fuel fabrication, transport, shielding, terrorism protection and the capacity factor over the life of the plant, significant amounts of greenhouse gases are emitted. This aspect of nuclear power generation has not been widely understood. Nuclear power generation uses a substantial amount of water for cooling and contributes to heat build up in water supplies. Nuclear energy might not be available in drought and extended heat waves. Additionally, this use of water impacts water availability for other urgent needs such as direct human use, agriculture, and the health of the biosphere.

Nuclear power generation has a limited source of fuel. Usable uranium, a non-renewable resource, is not inexhaustible and will be depleted rapidly if additional nuclear power plants are built.

Nuclear power generation is extremely expensive. Power companies could not build nuclear power plants without tax credits, guarantees, and direct federal government subsidies. The cost of storage of spent fuel is borne by taxpayers and future generations. It would be more productive, effective, and efficient in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to use funds for energy conservation, efficiency, renewable energy and cogeneration, than for construction and refurbishing of any and all nuclear power plants.

Nuclear power generation is part of the war machine. Plutonium from the spent fuel can be further enriched to form the core of a nuclear bomb. Depleted uranium, the nuclear waste left behind in the enrichment of uranium, leaves lethal radioactivity in the air and ground when weapons containing depleted uranium are used in war.

We accept the responsibility of working for all environmentally sound solutions to global climate change, including the complete phase-out of the use of oil, coal, gas, and nuclear power. We accept the responsibility of using less energy in all that we do and for working towards eliminating thermally generated electricity from fossil fueled, and nuclear powered utility plants, as a just and moral value for society at large.

In prayerful accord with our beliefs, we reject the use of nuclear energy as part of the solution to the problem of climate change. Until the earth's climate is stabilized, restored, and humanity has learned restraint, we affirm that providing more energy to support continuing, unrestrained economic growth is neither inevitable, desirable, nor in accordance with our spiritual understanding.