Nuclear Power Cannot Solve Climate Change

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A new report finds that nuclear power plants cannot be built quickly enough and in a safe and secure manner to be a major global solution for climate change.

(The findings were released yesterday from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.)

The report says the nuclear industry, under current policies and financing, won't be able to build enough new reactors to make a difference in climate in the next 20 years.

"Without major changes in government policies and aggressive financial support, nuclear power is actually likely to account for a declining percentage of global electricity generation," the report says.

The International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook 2008 projects that without policy changes, nuclear power's share of worldwide electricity generation will drop from 15 percent in 2006 to 10 percent in 2030.

Action Alert: The Nuclear Information and Resource Service urges you to send your Senators an e-mail on these amendments by clicking here.

But policymakers should be aware of the timeline, costs and risks nuclear power brings as compared to the possible benefits, before expending a tremendous amount of resources on it, the report says.

Bottlenecks in the nuclear supply chain, weak infrastructure in developing countries and tighter credit risk management strategies in the wake of the economic crises will severely limit all countries' capabilities to significantly expand their nuclear fleet, while the current fleet of reactors is likely to be retired by 2030, the report said.

The earliest the first new U.S. reactor could be finished is 2015, but the report notes that it takes about 10 years to put a new plant in service, from licensing to connection to the grid. In two dozen countries that are interested in obtaining civil nuclear energy but have not previously built a reactor, it will take even longer, the report says.

"The exigencies of energy security and climate change do not warrant racing ahead before institutional frameworks can ensure that any expansion makes sense, not just for energy needs, but for world security," the report says.

The report argues that nuclear energy is not likely to have a significant effect on energy security, either.

It will take at least two decades to convert the world's car fleet from oil to electricity. Transportation is the only sector where nuclear energy can significantly replace oil.

In addition, uranium and nuclear fuel come from only a few countries – Canada, Australia, Russia, the United States and France – making nations without resources or technologies as dependent on foreign sources of energy as before, the report notes. Worse still, it says, the need for fuel may drive more nations to develop their own uranium enrichment facilities, raising the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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