



Nuclear Energy Information Service

Illinois' Nuclear Power Watchdog since 1981

Office and Mail: 3411 W. Diversey Avenue, #16, Chicago, IL 60647-1245
(773)342-7650 www.neis.org neis@neis.org

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release
Wednesday, May 20, 2015

Contact: David Kraft, Nuclear Energy Information Service
(773)342-7650 (w); neis@neis.org

THE COUNTDOWN ON ILLINOIS' ENERGY FUTURE CONTINUES! PART 2: "NUCLEAR: IT ISN'T CLEAN, GREEN OR RENEWABLE"

CHICAGO-- [NOTE: With the Illinois Legislative session scheduled to end May 31st, and the Legislature soon to vote on the future direction of Illinois energy services, NEIS is initiating a series of releases over the next few weeks designed to address some of the myths, misconceptions, and ignored aspects of the debate.]

In a recent exchange in the Illinois Senate Energy Committee on Wednesday, May 13, Sen. Chris Nybo attempted to get Sen. Don Harmon, sponsor of the Illinois Clean Jobs Act, to describe nuclear power as clean and renewable. Sen Harmon steadfastly resisted this attempt to linguistically detoxify nuclear power.

"Nuclear power is NOT 'clean,' it is NOT 'green,' and it is NOT 'renewable,'" Dave Kraft, director of the Chicago-based Nuclear Energy Information Service states emphatically.

"Labeling something does not make it so," Kraft continued. "You can dress a pig in silk, marry it, and call it your spouse all you want. But one morning, you will wake up in bed to the reality of your delusion."

Using nuclear power to generate electricity may result in less carbon entering the atmosphere. But, in the same process large amounts of radioactive materials are unnaturally concentrated, manufactured, and ultimately released into the environment by nuclear power plants, the fuel chain required to provide and manufacture the fuel, and ultimately the radioactive wastes produced.

"Radioactive wastes are NOT clean. An energy source that produces hazardous high-level radioactive wastes which must be kept out of the environment for 225,000 years at great societal cost can hardly claim to call itself 'clean,'" Kraft asserts. "Trading more plutonium for less carbon is simply dumb energy policy, and totally unnecessary given the viable alternatives that already exist," he concludes.

Nuclear power plants are also responsible for other kinds of radioactive pollution and contamination:

- Exelon's Illinois nuclear reactors have already generated nearly 10,000 tons of long-lived "high-level" radioactive spent-fuel wastes, the most of any state in the U.S., adding ~300 tons more each year;
- Exelon's 11 Illinois nuclear reactors generate over 98% of the radioactivity found in all of the "low-level" radioactive wastes generated in Illinois in any particular year;
- Reactors are permitted by regulation to routinely discharge quantities of radioactive materials into the air and waters, provided they are below regulatory standards;
- Radionuclides are "accidentally" released into the environment due to management, equipment and personnel failures. The largest "accidental" release of radioactive tritium (a radioactive form of hydrogen) in the U.S. was released by Exelon's newest Braidwood reactors in the late 1990s. Over 6 million gallons were released, some of which found its way offsite, an incident which resulted in Exelon having to provide a new drinking water supply for the adjacent community of Godley;
- Uranium mining has created over 10,000 active and abandoned mines; and resulted in the creation of over 150 million tons of radioactive mill tailings, largely piled in open-air heaps at 51 sites, mostly on Native lands. The largest release of radiation in North America occurred at Church Rock, NM, on Diné lands in 1979, when a tailings pond dam burst into the Rio Puerco River, sending radioactive contaminants 25 miles downstream and into the area's only major source of drinking and grazing water.

"For decades nuclear proponents have been disingenuously using the phrases "clean", "non-polluting," and "renewable" to describe nuclear power," Kraft points out. "Most recently this has occurred in Illinois with Exelon's HB 3293 'Low-Carbon Portfolio Standard'—an attempt to pitch its failed and money-losing reactors as

essential 'low-carbon' sources to help the state meet the upcoming U.S. EPA Carbon Rule standards. This opportunistic use of the EPA Rule to justify a \$1.6 BILLION bailout is the latest attempt of Exelon to re-write reality for corporate profit," Kraft says.

Exelon claims its reactors are not being valued enough for their contribution of not releasing carbon into the atmosphere as fossil fuel power plants do. This re-writes history, according to Kraft:

"First, no Exelon reactor ever built in Illinois was built (and paid for by ratepayers) with the express purpose of removing carbon or fighting global warming," Kraft points out "They were built to make money for then-ComEd and now Exelon shareholders. That they are 'lower-carbon' is an accidental, not intentional benefit. Other truly renewable energy sources produce NO carbon emissions, and have no fuel costs or wastes associated with their generation of electricity," Kraft points out.

No definition of "renewable energy" used in government includes nuclear power as a "renewable" source:

WIKIPEDIA (1):

"Renewable energy is generally defined as energy that comes from resources which are naturally replenished on a human timescale such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves and geothermal heat."

U.S. DEPT. OF ENERGY DEFINITION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY (2):

"Renewable Energy: Energy derived from resources that are regenerative or for all practical purposes cannot be depleted. Types of renewable energy resources include moving water (hydro, tidal and wave power), thermal gradients in ocean water, biomass, geothermal energy, solar energy, and wind energy. Municipal solid waste (MSW) is also considered to be a renewable energy resource."

"The Illinois Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard law also does not include nuclear power as a 'renewable' energy source," Kraft points out, "and for good reason: it's not."

For decades the nuclear industry and its promoters at the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) have been trying to "prettify" nuclear energy as being "clean," "non-polluting," and "renewable. In 1998 fifteen national environmental groups filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau's National Advertising Division in opposition to claims made by Nuclear Energy Institute ads stating at the time, "...nuclear energy generates electricity without polluting the air or water..." was "environmentally clean" and produces electricity "without polluting the environment."

The BBB/NAD sided with the environmental groups against these overly broad nuclear industry claims, urging the nuclear industry and NEI specifically to stop the potentially deceptive ads:

"...NAD recommends that water and air pollution claims be carefully qualified to avoid any potential for consumer confusion and that broad, unqualified claims that nuclear energy is "Environmentally Clean" or produces electricity "without polluting the environment" be discontinued." (3)

"In spite of this very specific public rebuke by the BBB/NAD, Exelon ads under its "Nuclear Matters" campaign (4) that appeared in the New York Times from April through October of 2014 refer to nuclear power as 'clean' and 'carbon-free' and 'emit zero air pollution' – all claims which were criticized by BBB/NAD as "inaccurate," "overly broad," and "misleading," and further noting that, **"It is a fundamental principle of advertising law that a claim that is technically truthful can still be misleading."** (3, p. 20)

"It would behoove our legislators to engage in decidedly more critical thinking when evaluating the 'technically truthful' assertions of Exelon Corporation found in its Low-Carbon Portfolio Standard legislation," warns Kraft. "In fact, given Exelon's and the nuclear industry's long and documented history of misleading people while being technically truthful about how 'clean, green and renewable' nuclear power is, the only rational course of action seems to be to completely reject Exelon's bailout in the absence of proof," he concludes.

--30--

(1) Wikipedia – definition of "renewable energy"

(2) U.S. Dept. of Energy website: definition of renewable energy

(3) Opinion by the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., National Advertising Division, Dec. 3, 1998, 22 pages.

(4) "Nuclear Matters" ads placed in New York Times, 4/3/14 and 10/1/14