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## Spinning Nuclear Power into Green

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After the partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania on March 28, 1979, concerned citizens from across the United States banded together to stop nuclear power in its tracks. Perhaps the most effective anti-nuclear gathering in U.S. history was the five-day No Nukes concert series held in New York City in September 1979. On the last day, 250,000 people rallied in Lower Manhattan - just across from the World Trade Center - to protest nuclear power. This massive battle cry was heard in Washington, DC. Plans to build new U.S. nuclear power plants were put on hold. And after the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe in Ukraine, plans for new U.S. nuclear plants were abandoned.

It seemed that nuclear power had become an energy dinosaur of the past.

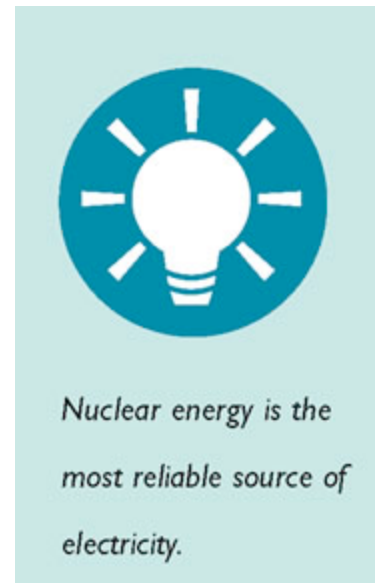
### Nuclear Rebirth

As the twentieth century came to an end and many of the United States' 103 nuclear power plants were reaching the end of their 40-year licenses, experts predicted that nuclear power plant owners would opt to shut down their nuclear plants in favor of natural gas-fired plants.

But the owners had other ideas. Now on its last leg, the nuclear industry is battling to avoid extinction.

With an ardently pro-nuclear administration in the White House and a rise in natural gas prices, nuclear power plant owners have changed gears, applying for license extensions at a rapid rate. To date 30 U.S. nuclear power plants have been granted 20-year license extensions, 18 are currently under review and nearly 30 are slated to enter the relicensing process in the near future. Entergy, one of the largest nuclear plant operators, is expected in the near future to file for 20-year license extensions for Indian Point, its facilities located just 35 miles from downtown New York City.

Behind this nuclear resurgence is the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), the lobbying arm of the nuclear industry. NEI and Entergy have a close relationship. The company's president, Don Hintz, chaired NEI's board of directors from 2002 to 2004. Gary J. Taylor, chief executive officer for Entergy Operations, was elected in 2004 to NEI's executive committee. Also in 2004, NEI released Vision 2020, a report calling for the building of 50 new nuclear power plants by the year 2020 and labeling nuclear power "an environmentally clean source



A detail from an advertisement by the nuclear industry-funded National Energy Institute that emphasizes the "reliability" of nuclear power.

[that] should be linked directly to the production of alternative clean fuels."

NEI's goal is to promote nuclear power as "clean energy." This message directly defies a 1998 ruling by the National Advertising Division (NAD) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, which stated that the Nuclear Energy Institute should "discontinue" its "inaccurate" advertisements that claim nuclear power is clean. The NAD called on NEI to terminate its advertisements 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."

In their decision, the NAD noted that nuclear energy cannot be considered "environmentally clean" for several reasons. First, the uranium enrichment process relies heavily on electricity generated from coal-burning plants that produce "a significant amount of greenhouse gases." And perhaps most importantly, unlike other forms of energy, nuclear power produces toxic, radioactive waste, for which no safe method of disposal has been approved. U.S. nuclear plants have produced over 40,000 metric tons of high-level radioactive waste, which is deadly for hundreds of thousands of years. Yucca Mountain - the federal government's chosen national repository - continues to face legal, scientific and political setbacks. If approved, the site could begin receiving shipments by 2010, but experts predict it could be much longer, if ever, before the site opens. Meanwhile across the country, communities located near nuclear plants are forced to live in close proximity to one of the deadliest materials on the planet.

While the public may not (yet) be persuaded that nuclear power is clean, President Bush has bought into NEI's propaganda. In his 2005 State of the Union address, the President referred to his "comprehensive energy strategy" which includes "safe, clean nuclear energy." With strong financial backing from the nuclear industry in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns as well as a notable donation from NEI to his 2004 inaugural festivities, President Bush is now traveling across the country promoting construction of new nuclear power plants. His budget includes \$511 million in taxpayer subsidies for the building of new nuclear power plants and \$56 million for a new project called "Nuclear Power 2010." Meanwhile, truly clean and green renewable energy sources such as wind and solar continued to receive much less financial support from the federal government. In the last 50 years, nuclear energy subsidies have totaled close to \$145 billion; renewable energy subsidies total close to \$5 billion.

## Clean & Green Bamboozlement

One of the most audacious disinformation campaigns coming from the nuclear industry is its slow but steady attempt to corner the energy market as a "clean, green energy source." As global warming became a household term, and attention focused on carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired plants as a major contributing factor to climate change, the nuclear industry recreated itself as the cure to global warming.

During 2001, NEI released three different print advertisements that circulated 49 times, primarily in Capitol Hill news sources such as *Roll Call*, *CongressDaily AM*, and *The Hill*. The ads also ran in the *Washington Post*. These ads promoted Yucca Mountain as the national repository for high-level radioactive waste, and branded nuclear power as "the Clean Air Energy."

In addition to 92 print ads and 55 television spots on nuclear plant security, NEI continued to promote nuclear power as clean energy. Perhaps the most disingenuous of these pro-nuclear "clean energy"



advertisements focuses on children. In one print ad, NEI states, "Kids today are part of the most energy-intensive generation in history. They demand lots of electricity. And they deserve clean

Part of an advertisement from a National Energy Institute campaign, promoting the "clear air" benefits of nuclear power.

air. . . . We need secure, domestic sources of electricity for the 21st Century-and we also need clean air. With nuclear energy, we can have both." The ad copy accompanies three idealized images of children - jumping in a lake, sitting on a lawn while working on a laptop, and swinging from a tire. Health statistics from the Chernobyl region, however, have shown nuclear power is far from innocent, especially for children. A dramatic increase in leukemia and thyroid cancer among other health problems is seen in children exposed to radiation released by the 1986 Chernobyl accident. n

*Lisa Rainwater van Suntum, PhD, directs the Riverkeeper Indian Point Campaign. To learn more about the campaign, visit [http://www.riverkeeper.org/campaign.php/indian\\_point/](http://www.riverkeeper.org/campaign.php/indian_point/) [1]. Riverkeeper reports on their website that their current annual budget is "just over \$2 million. Approximately 45% of that amount comes from private foundations, 2% from government drinking water protection grants, and the rest from members and individual contributors."*

### **Published in PR Watch [2], First Quarter 2005, Volume 12, No. 1 [3]**

- Previous story: (Un)Safe, (Un)Secure, and (Not)Vital: Marketing a Nuclear Power Plant [4]
- Next story: 'No Dark Machiavellian Conspiracy' for New British Nuke Plants [5]

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#### **Links:**

[1] [http://www.riverkeeper.org/campaign.php/indian\\_point/](http://www.riverkeeper.org/campaign.php/indian_point/)

[2] <http://www.prwatch.org/cmd/prwatch.html>

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