



Campaign for Nuclear Phaseout Campagne contre l'expansion du nucléaire

Canada's Federal Government is Wrong Nuclear Power is not a "solution" to climate change

Globally, the nuclear industry is in decline. Countries like Sweden, Germany and Switzerland are committed to phasing out nuclear power. In North America, there have been no new nuclear reactor sales since 1978.

A 1999 poll taken in Ontario, Canada's largest province and where the majority of nuclear power reactors are located, showed that only nineteen percent of respondents ranked nuclear power as their preferred electricity option (Angus Reid poll, February 1999). As part of its survival strategy, the nuclear power industry is exploiting global concern over climate change and is attempting to promote nuclear power as a solution.

Over the years, several studies have shown that investment in nuclear power does not adequately address the problem of climate change.¹ For example, the Royal Society of Canada's Canadian Options for Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction panel found that "improved energy efficiency is the key to stabilising energy-related CO₂ emissions over the next two decades."² Nuclear power is not once mentioned as a viable energy alternative to fossil fuels. Moreover, a U.S. study found that every dollar invested in energy efficiency displaces seven times as much CO₂ emissions as the same dollar invested in nuclear power.³

In spite of this, the Government of Canada has been aggressively pushing for the inclusion of nuclear energy as part of a CO₂ reduction strategy in various climate change forums — a strategy which deliberately ignores radioactive waste and other nuclear pollution issues. Proponents of nuclear energy were pushing for its inclusion as part of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) at the 6th Conference Of the Parties (COP6) which took place in November 2000. However, a decision on what to include in the CDM was deferred when the conference ended without an agreement.

The Clean Development Mechanism will allow Canada and other signatories to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas reductions to receive 'emissions credits' for projects undertaken in developing countries.⁴

While the mechanics of the Clean Development Mechanism are still being defined, the CDM would allow the Canadian government to undertake or participate in projects abroad that reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse emissions. Even though emissions would be reduced in a foreign country, Canada as a project participant would be entitled to a share of the total emission reduction 'credit' and could use this credit when accounting for its overall emissions reduction compliance with the Kyoto protocol.

The Clean Development Mechanism has been described as a market-based concept— essentially a variation on the idea of 'tradeable emissions'. The tradeable emissions concept has been criticized for its potential to allow states and large transnational corporations to continue undertaking highly polluting activities by moving emissions credits from one place to another. In Canada, the CDM has been used by the federal government to market Canadian nuclear reactors in developing countries as part of a CO₂ 'emissions reduction credit' program.

There are clear alternatives to the tradeable emissions shell game which do not rely on either coal or nuclear power generation. In April 2000, the David Suzuki Foundation published a groundbreaking study entitled "Power Shift: Cool Solutions to Global Warming".

"Power Shift" describes how it is possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Canada by 50% (at 1995 levels) by 2030. Solutions include commercial and residential retrofits and innovations in the transportation sector. The study authored by energy expert Ralph Torrie shows that it is possible using available technologies to shut down large scale coal, oil and nuclear plants by 2030.⁵

Endnotes

¹ See for example: <http://www.antenna.nl/wise/cop6/related/index.html>

² Royal Society of Canada, "Final Report of the COGGER Panel", Ottawa, Ontario: the Royal Society of Canada, 1993, p.i

³ Bill Keepin and Gregory Kats, "Greenhouse Warming: comparative analysis of nuclear and energy efficiency abatement strategies", Energy Policy, vol. 16, no.6, December 1988

⁴ Canada is one of the so-called 'Annex 1' countries who have agreed to reduce their overall emissions by at least 5% below 1990 levels during the period 2008-2012. For background on the CDM, see for example: Michael Toman and Marina Cazorla, The Clean Development Mechanism: A Primer, Resources for the Future, Washington, D.C. 1998, web site: <http://www.weathervane.rff.org/features/feature048.html>

⁵ David Suzuki Foundation, Cool Solutions to Global Warming, Vancouver, B.C.: April 2000, p. 9. A copy of the report is available at <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/PDF/powershift11.pdf>.

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