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Nuclear Energy Support Hits Record-High Levels Among Americans, New Survey Shows

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 29, 2010—A record-high 74 percent of Americans support nuclear energy and a similarly strong majority (70 percent) says the United States should “definitely build more” nuclear energy facilities, a new national survey shows.



The survey of 1,000 adults March 18-21 by Bisconti Research Inc./Gfk Roper found that 84 percent of Americans believe that electric utilities should begin preparation now to build new nuclear plants if needed in the next decade. Eighty-seven percent believe nuclear energy “will play an important role in meeting this nation’s electricity needs” in the years to come.

“This unprecedented support for nuclear energy is being driven largely by people’s concerns for meeting future energy demand and environmental goals, but it coincides with statements by President Obama and other national leaders who have voiced strong support for more nuclear power plants,” said Ann Bisconti, president of Bisconti Research Inc. “The president’s State of the Union speech and his subsequent announcement of federal loan guarantees for new nuclear reactors in Georgia clearly has elevated the issue in peoples’ minds.”

The survey shows that, among respondents with the most intense feelings about nuclear energy, those who strongly support nuclear energy exceed those who strongly oppose it by a three-to-one margin (33 percent to 10 percent).

The poll also shows that Americans are highly supportive (72 percent) of the federal government playing an active role in encouraging investment in solar, wind, advanced-design nuclear power plants or other energy technologies that reduce emissions of greenhouse gases linked to the threat of global climate change.

Public confidence in nuclear plant safety also is at record levels. When asked to rate the safety of nuclear power plants on a 1-to-7 scale, 73 percent gave high ratings (5, 6 or 7) compared with 35 percent in 1984, when the question was first asked. Also, 82 percent agreed that U.S. nuclear power plants are “safe and secure.”

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This confidence is evidenced by support (a record-high 87 percent) for license renewal for nuclear power plants that continue to meet federal safety standards. Nuclear power plants operating in 31 states produce 20 percent of the nation's electricity, even though they constitute only 10 percent of installed electric generating capacity.

Surveys conducted by Bisconti Research show a large change in the public's view of nuclear energy over time. Favorability has climbed fairly steadily from 49 percent in 1983 to 74 percent today.

Although the public is somewhat confident in the nuclear industry's ability to safely store used reactor fuel at nuclear power plant sites (59 percent), eight out of 10 of those surveyed expressed a strong desire for the federal government to move used nuclear fuel rods to centralized, secure storage facilities away from the plant sites until a permanent disposal facility is ready. The survey also showed strong support (79 percent) for recycling used fuel from nuclear energy facilities to generate additional electricity and ultimately reduce the amount of waste that must be permanently disposed.

You can view the questionnaire used for the survey at <http://www.nei.org/resourcesandstats/documentlibrary/protectingtheenvironment/reports/march-2010-public-opinion-memo/>.

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The Nuclear Energy Institute is the nuclear energy industry's policy organization. This news release and additional information about nuclear energy are available at www.nei.org.