

nuclear power

"Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all Parties to the Treaty to develop, research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination..."
from Article IV of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty

Nuclear power was once promoted as clean and safe, and "too cheap to meter".

However, with the reality of increasing volumes of nuclear waste, critical accidents at power stations and the potential use of reactor technology for military and weapons purposes, the world is waking up to the risks of nuclear energy. It is not clean or safe and it is certainly not cheap.

Article IV of the NPT, the mandate of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and agreements made between the IAEA and the World Health Organization are documents of their time and reflect historically specific moments in science and in politics. Assumptions made in 1945, or 1968, about nuclear technology have to be reevaluated in a world that has experienced Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. When the Non-Proliferation Treaty was negotiated, nuclear power was still a relatively new technology. There were high hopes and clear assumptions that it would be safe, clean and cheap and that its proliferation risks could be contained. Experience has shown us that these assessments cannot be supported and that the risks were gravely underestimated.

There are sustainable energy alternatives, which, if given the same amount of research and development funding and commercial support could meet the demands of the worlds energy needs without the disastrous impacts of the nuclear option.

Importantly, it is neither possible and nor acceptable for our governments to separate out weapons and call the rest of the nuclear industry "peaceful". Around 70% of the world's uranium deposits are located on indigenous lands, and the industry creates upheaval and dislocation of these peoples through their activities. For these communities in particular, "peaceful uses" often does not mean peaceful origins. Indeed with the problem of long-lived nuclear waste still unresolved, "peaceful uses" also does not mean peaceful ends.



FACT FILE:

How many nuclear power stations currently exist?

In the year 2001 the world has 438 operational nuclear power stations with 31 more under construction according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

How much electricity do they supply?

These stations supply approximately 16 per cent of the worlds electricity, 85 per cent of which is concentrated in industrialized countries.

Who has Nuclear Power Stations?

150 nuclear reactors are based in Western Europe, and a further 118 in North America.

France has reported the greatest dependence on nuclear power, with 76.3 per cent of its electricity being nuclear powered.

Lithuania follows a close second with 73.7 per cent.

South Korea generates 40.7 per cent of their electricity needs from nuclear power, Sweden 39 per cent and Switzerland 38.2 per cent.

The Middle East and Asia have 94 nuclear power plants, but particularly China, India, South Korea and Japan are looking to continue the industry, according to the IAEA.

Western Europe has 150 reactors, compared to 118 for North America.

What is the IAEA?

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was set up in 1957 to monitor the development of nuclear technology. The agency is based in Vienna and have representatives around the world.