

## Foes of nuclear power may soon run out of steam

*My! When Gus Speth of the Natural Resources Defense Council anti organization turns against the religion that he taught to Bill Carter of Georgia something must be happening.*

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It may be dawning on national environmental groups that nuclear power will be essential in the battle against global warming. Three leading environmentalists – Fred Krupp, director of Environmental Defense; Jonathan Lash, president of the World Resources Institute; and Gus Speth, cofounder of the Natural Resources Defense Council and now Dean of Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies – said recently the global warming problem is so serious that nuclear power deserves another look.

In America and around the globe, the release of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels continues to grow, and the result has been alarming environmental changes: rising sea levels, acidic oceans, melting tundra in Arctic regions, more intense hurricanes, catastrophic droughts, and the spread of mosquito-borne diseases.

Although there is greater public awareness of climate change than in years past, U.S. emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide continue to add grievously to the global burden of pollution. The long-term outlook is grim. The Energy Information Administration forecasts that carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels in the United States will increase an average of 1.2 percent a year and reach 7.5 billion metric tons by 2025, a 28 percent increase over the amount released in 2004.

Because nuclear power is carbon-free and provides large amounts of "base-load" electricity, some environmental leaders are acknowledging it could play a decisive role in halting the increase in carbon dioxide emissions and eventually reducing them. Stewart Brand, a founder of the Whole Earth Catalog, wrote in a recent issue of *Technology Review*, published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: "The only technology ready to fill the gap and stop the carbon-dioxide loading is nuclear power."

And Patrick Moore, cofounder of Greenpeace, who has broken with the group over its continuing opposition to nuclear power, voiced support at the United Nations' international climate conference in Montreal. "Nuclear energy is the only non-greenhouse-emitting energy source that can effectively replace fossil fuels and satisfy global demand for energy," said Moore, who advocated "an aggressive nuclear power program."

This marks a dramatic change in the way environmental leaders view nuclear power, and it sends a powerful, supportive message to markets and governments around the world. Nuclear power has a key role to play in preventing carbon emissions. Of course, there are some environmental groups – Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, among others – that remain adamantly opposed to nuclear power, but increasingly they appear to be extremists who are blocking any realistic energy policies.

If nuclear power's environmental benefits and proven reliability aren't enough to convince every one of its merits, simple arithmetic shows its advantage over renewable energy sources. Currently nuclear power provides about 17 percent of the world's

electricity, whereas two renewable sources that emit no heat-trapping gases, solar and wind energy combined, account for less than 2 percent.

The world has enough uranium for a substantial long-term increase in nuclear power production. But expanding the use of nuclear power requires a lot more than the flick of a switch.

In the United States, where there hasn't been a new order for a nuclear power plant in 35 years, there are indications that may change soon. Electric utilities in seven states are preparing to seek licenses to construct and operate new nuclear plants, and three already have applied for early-site approval. Congress has authorized \$11 billion in tax credits and other incentives for construction of the first few nuclear plants. Overall, the Government's goal is to raise nuclear power's share of U.S. electricity production from 20 percent now to at least 25 percent by 2020.

Worldwide, expectations for nuclear power are also rising, in large part because of a sense of urgency over climate change. Great Britain and Canada are moving toward building a new generation of nuclear power plants, and Australia is giving serious consideration to launching its own nuclear power program. Countries already committed to building new nuclear plants include France, which gets 78 percent of its electricity from nuclear power, and Japan, China and South Korea.

The real value of nuclear power would be to counteract the inherent tendency in many countries to keep burning more fossil fuels for electricity production. Using it for this purpose would provide a powerful weapon in the battle against global warming, reminding the markets not only that nuclear power exists, but that it is going to be an important part of the solution.