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Union of Concerned Scientists now supports nuclear power

On



November 8th, the Union of Concerned scientists became the first major environmental non-profit to announce publicly its support for nuclear energy. It issued a report called **[“The Nuclear Power Dilemma: Declining Profits, Plant Closures, and the Threat of Rising Carbon Emissions,”](#)** which assessed the status of existing nuclear power and the urgency of reducing emissions because of climate change, arguing for the need to keep all operating and safe nuclear plants open, because otherwise, emissions would rise.

Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) president, Ken Kimmel, further explained the rationale for UCS’ new stance on nuclear in a blog post called **[Why We’re Take a](#)**

Hard Look at Nuclear Closures, in which he writes:

The report also indicates that without new policies, the electricity generated by these and other marginally economic nuclear plants is likely to be replaced in large part with natural gas-fired generation (although this will vary from plant to plant). If this occurs, cumulative carbon emissions in the electric sector could increase by up to 6 percent between 2018 and 2035.

While a 6 percent increase in emissions doesn't sound that sizable, emissions from the electric sector must decrease, rapidly and substantially. The [National Research Council](#) has found, for example, that power plant emissions must decrease by 90 percent by 2040 to meet US climate goals.

Most of that reduction will be achieved by using electricity more efficiently, expanding increasingly cheap solar, wind, and energy storage, modernizing our grid, and building more transmission lines to connect these renewable sources to load centers. We are counting on these approaches to replace capacity as coal plants close; cut down on an overreliance on natural gas in the short term and displace it over time; and increase overall electricity supply to pave the way for the electrification of transportation, space and water heating, and industrial processes.

But if nuclear power plants close prematurely, we add a fourth task—replacing lost nuclear capacity. While efficiency, renewables, transmission and storage may be up to the task, governments must adopt policies that assure that we will decarbonize even if these resources fall short of our expectations.

Factoring all of these considerations in, our new report calls for proactive policy to preserve nuclear power from existing plants that are operating safely but are at risk of premature closures for economic reasons or to ensure that lost nuclear capacity is replaced with carbon-free sources.

For another take on this somewhat historic moment, Ted Nordhaus of The Breakthrough Institute wrote a response entitled **“A New Day for Nuclear Advocacy...and Environmentalism?: Union of Concerned Scientists Becomes First Major Environmental Group to Publicly Back Policy Support for Nuclear Energy”** in which he says:

This represents a marked break from many other major environmental groups, who continue to argue that shuttered nuclear plants can be replaced entirely with energy efficiency and renewables, even as those technologies scale to replace fossil energy as well. For this reason, UCS endorses our long-standing call for Clean Energy Standards at the state and federal level in place of Renewable Portfolio Standards.

That UCS would become the first major environmental group to acknowledge an important role for nuclear energy in climate mitigation efforts is particularly symbolic. The organization was founded in the late 1960's by veterans of the scientists movement, which had mobilized in the 1940's and 50's in response to concerns about the use and misuse of nuclear technology.

But in recent years, it has become increasingly evident that efforts to address climate change solely through reduced energy use and deployment of wind, water, and solar energy will not be nearly sufficient to meet global energy needs while dramatically slashing emissions.

We applaud the Union of Concerned Scientists, one of our most scientific of green groups, for its courage in finally breaking ranks and making the shift from “emotional thinker” to “rational thinker.” In doing so, they join many other **leading energy thinkers** who support policies that preserve existing nuclear power to protect energy diversity, protect rate-payer investments, protect the climate and even **help maintain lower energy costs to consumers**.

Unfortunately, we badly need other environmental groups to follow this

courageous example, and start to embrace facts and physics. Rather than fighting physics and physicists—who currently get little love for generating the lion’s share of all clean energy—now would be a good time for our most respected environmental leaders to call a world-wide clean energy *détente* and start working together to develop 100% clean energy grids to combat global emissions. We need renewables advocates and nuclear advocates to partner for zero emission solutions and for renewables to ditch their ill-conceived “**partnership with natural gas**”—which is a bridge to climate catastrophe. Yes, clearly there will be some explaining to do to supporters but we firmly believe the now extremely dire fate facing the planet justifies taking this bold risk, as the Union of Concerned Scientists has just done, since what we’ve been doing just hasn’t been working well enough. UCS set a great example, and now more of our trusted environmental leaders should join with them in recognizing the importance of nuclear power to our clean energy future.

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About the Author: [Valerie Gardner](#)

Valerie Gardner has focused on finding scalable ways for individuals, organizations and governments to respond to climate change since 2005. She learned the basics by creating environmental educational programs for schools, then broadening her purview to create programming for area towns starting in 2007. In 2010, she began exploring how to decrease carbon emission exposure from investment portfolios and developed a "post-carbon-priced" portfolio strategy. Her research into clean energy solutions at scale led her to nuclear power, where she discovered the industry's impressive technological performance and a rather large but under-the-radar pronuclear community. She thought more

environmentalists needed to get to #KnowNukes better. In 2016, she co-founded the Climate Coalition with a few other climate activists and who recognized that without nuclear's clean baseload power, humanity will remain dependent upon fossil fuels—especially natural gas—for reliable grids for far too long. The Climate Coalition is working to broaden awareness of this problem and the increasingly urgent need for the environmental movement to finally acknowledge the immense benefits of nuclear energy.

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