

# PublicOpinion

Prepared by the Nuclear Energy Institute March 1999

## Speaking About Clean Air and Waste Legislation: Lessons From the Research

by Ann S. Bisconti, Ph.D.

Surveys conducted throughout 1998 illustrate that Americans don't readily link two important subjects:

1) nuclear energy's contribution to clean air and 2) the federal used fuel legislation needed to allow continued plant operation, thereby preserving those clean air benefits. Recent NEI research shows, however, that with greater awareness of clean air benefits Americans have a greater incentive to support federal used fuel legislation.

Messages for communicating with the public about nuclear energy and waste legislation were tested in 1998 as an add-on to several opinion surveys for NEI by Bisconti Research Inc. This research included two nationally representative surveys of college graduates who are registered to vote, as well as several surveys among the general public.\* The opinion research depicts the attitudes and perceptions people currently hold; the message research indicates which points make the strongest case for increasing support for nuclear energy and for waste legislation among these audiences.

For both the college graduate/registered voter segment and the general public, the

---

Ann S. Bisconti is president of Bisconti Research, Inc.

### Best Reasons To Use Nuclear Energy

*"I'm going to read some statements about nuclear energy and, for each one, I'd like you to tell me how good a reason you feel it is to use nuclear energy as a source of electricity in the United States. You can use any number from zero to 10 to express your feelings. Zero means it is not at all a good reason, and 10 means it is an extremely good reason."*

Percent Rating Message 8-10 (very good or extremely good reason to use nuclear energy)

	January 1998	July 1998
Nuclear energy plants keep the air clean.	<b>64</b>	<b>62</b>
Using nuclear energy reduces our reliance on energy from unstable parts of the world.	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>
As our population and economy grow, more electricity from available sources like nuclear energy will be needed.	<b>61</b>	<b>62</b>
Using nuclear energy preserves America's natural resources for future generations.	<b>56</b>	<b>53</b>
Using nuclear energy helps prevent climate change, because nuclear energy plants provide a large part of the electricity we need without emitting greenhouse gases.	<b>50</b>	<b>52</b>
New advanced design nuclear energy plants are safer.	<b>48</b>	<b>50</b>
Nuclear energy is the second cheapest form of electricity production in the United States, second only to coal and less expensive than natural gas.	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>
New advanced design nuclear energy plants by U.S. manufacturers have been certified by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for use in the United States, and two of these U.S. plants have already been built in Japan.	<b>32</b>	<b>35</b>
The National Academy of Sciences and many international scientific organizations agree that the method of nuclear waste disposal that is underway in the United States is safe for current and future generations.	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>

(College Graduates, Registered To Vote)

best reason to use nuclear energy is to “keep the air clean.”

But what does clean air have to do with used fuel legislation? NEI research for many years has found that reminding people about the benefits of nuclear energy gives them a compelling rationale for supporting waste legislation.

In December 1998, we tested five messages in support of used fuel legislation among the general public. These messages incorporated lessons learned in earlier years and speak to key values: environmental protection, taking responsibility, safety, and economic security.

All the messages are quite persuasive. And among the most persuasive is a clean

air message, which relates to the value of environmental protection: “Nuclear energy plants are needed because they generate 20 percent of the nation’s electricity without emitting any air pollution or greenhouse gases.” Two-thirds of the public said that this point would increase their support for federal legislation to take used fuel to a centralized temporary storage facility.

Equally persuasive are points about responsibility (“We have a responsibility to future generations to begin long-term storage now at a single federal storage facility”) and safety (“It would be easier to monitor and regulate fewer storage sites,” and “We’ve collected vast scientific knowledge in seeking to solve the used nuclear

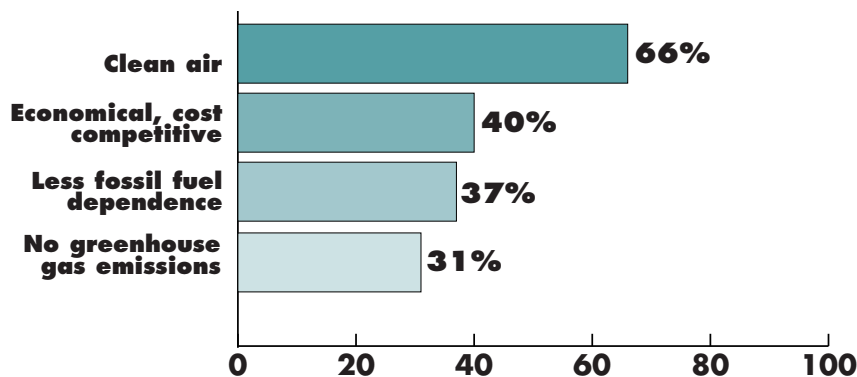
fuel disposal issue, and the U.S. is well prepared to apply this knowledge in safe storage and disposal of our used nuclear fuel.”)

Points about the extra cost to store used fuel on site continue to rate somewhat lower than the others. Environmental protection, responsibility, and safety rank above economics in the hierarchy of values that link to support for waste legislation.

*\*All the surveys were with nationally representative samples of 1,000. The margin of error for this sample size is plus or minus three percentage points.*

## Clean Air Is Leading Benefit

*“Which one of these benefits of nuclear energy seems most important to you? ...And which of these others is most important?” (Top two selected)*



Source: U.S. public, December 1998

## Statements in Support of Waste Legislation

*“I am going to read several statements. Please tell me if the statement would increase your support a lot, increase your support a little, decrease your support a little, or decrease your support a lot for legislation for the federal government to take the used fuel to a temporary storage facility until the permanent nuclear waste facility is ready.”*

Response to statements ►

## Percent Saying Message Would Increase Support for Legislation To Take the Used Fuel to a Temporary Storage Facility

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
We have a responsibility to the environment and future generations to begin long-term storage now at a single federal storage facility.	<b>69</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>65</b>
Nuclear energy plants are needed because they generate 20 percent of the nation's electricity without emitting air pollution or greenhouse gases.	<b>68</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>64</b>
It would be easier to monitor and regulate fewer fuel storage sites.	<b>67</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>65</b>
We've collected vast scientific knowledge in seeking to solve the used nuclear fuel disposal issue, and the U.S. is well prepared to apply this knowledge in safe storage and disposal of our used nuclear fuel.	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>61</b>
The used nuclear fuel is now stored at more than 100 nuclear energy plants, and new storage facilities costing millions of dollars each will have to be built at many of the plant sites, if no federal storage or disposal site is completed soon.	<b>51</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>48</b>

## Percent Saying Message Would Increase Support 'a Lot'

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Responsibility	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>35</b>
No air pollution	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>29</b>
Easier to monitor	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>
Scientific knowledge	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>
Millions of dollars	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>



NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE



*Printed on recycled paper*