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## EDITORIAL DESK

## Nukes Are Green

By **NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF** (NYT) 793 words

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If there was one thing that used to be crystal clear to any environmentalist, it was that nuclear energy was the deadliest threat this planet faced. That's why Dick Gregory pledged at a huge anti-nuke demonstration in 1979 that he would eat no solid food until all nuclear plants in the U.S. were shut down.

Mr. Gregory may be getting hungry.

But it's time for the rest of us to drop that hostility to nuclear power. It's increasingly clear that the biggest environmental threat we face is actually global warming, and that leads to a corollary: nuclear energy is green.

Nuclear power, in contrast with other sources, produces no greenhouse gases. So President Bush's overall environmental policy gives me the shivers, but he's right to push ahead for nuclear energy. There haven't been any successful orders for new nuclear plants since 1973, but several proposals for new plants are now moving ahead -- and that's good for the world we live in.

Global energy demand will rise 60 percent over the next 25 years, according to the International Energy Agency, and nuclear power is the cleanest and best bet to fill that gap.

Solar power is a disappointment, still accounting for only about one-fifth of 1 percent of the nation's electricity and costing about five times as much as other sources. Wind is promising, for its costs have fallen 80 percent, but it suffers from one big problem: wind doesn't blow all the time. It's difficult to rely upon a source that comes and goes.

In contrast, nuclear energy already makes up 20 percent of America's power, not to mention 75 percent of France's.

A sensible energy plan must encourage conservation -- far more than Mr. Bush's plans do -- and promote things like hybrid vehicles and hydrogen fuel cells. But for now, nuclear power is the only source that doesn't contribute to global warming and that can quickly become a mainstay of the grid.

Is it safe? No, not entirely. Three Mile Island and Chernobyl demonstrated that, and there are also risks from terrorist attacks.

Then again, the world now has a half-century of experience with nuclear power plants, 440 of them around the world, and they have proved safer so far than the alternatives. America's biggest power source is now coal, which kills about 25,000 people a year through soot in the air.

To put it another way, nuclear energy seems much safer than our dependency on coal, which kills more than 60 people every day.

Moreover, nuclear technology has become far safer over the years. The future may belong to pebble-bed reactors, a new design that promises to be both highly efficient and incapable of a meltdown.

Radioactive wastes are a challenge. But burdening future generations with nuclear wastes in deep shafts is probably more reasonable than burdening them with a warmer world in which Manhattan is submerged under 20 feet of water.

Right now, the only significant source of electricity in the U.S. that does not involve carbon emissions is hydropower. But salmon runs have declined so much that we should be ripping out dams, not adding more.

What killed nuclear power in the past was cold economics. Major studies at M.I.T. and elsewhere show that nuclear power is still a bit more expensive than new coal or natural gas plants, but in the same ballpark if fossil fuel prices rise. And if a \$200-per-ton tax was imposed on carbon emissions, nuclear energy would become cheaper than coal from new plants.

So it's time to welcome nuclear energy as green . Indeed, some environmentalists are already climbing onboard. For example, the National Commission on Energy Policy, a privately financed effort involving environmentalists, academics and industry representatives, issued a report in December that favors new nuclear plants.

One of the most eloquent advocates of nuclear energy is James Lovelock, the British scientist who created the Gaia hypothesis, which holds that Earth is, in effect, a self-regulating organism.

"I am a Green, and I entreat my friends in the movement to drop their wrongheaded objection to nuclear energy," Mr. Lovelock wrote last year, adding: "Every year that we continue burning carbon makes it worse for our descendents. Only one immediately available source does not cause global warming, and that is nuclear energy."

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