



NUCLEAR ENERGY AND PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE

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The continued use of nuclear power in the European Union and elsewhere requires an adequate level of public and political acceptance. A lack of acceptance is often mistakenly cited as a reason for the slowdown in nuclear power plant construction in Western Europe and as a justification for abandoning nuclear power.

In fact, the reasons for the slowdown have more to do with the following two factors:

Plentiful supplies of low-priced natural gas, making gas-fired power plants a more attractive investment choice; more than adequate supplies of electricity which have curbed the need for the construction of new plant of any kind.

In general, moves towards a withdrawal from nuclear in certain Community countries have been due to party political pressures and have not been a response to public opposition to nuclear. In addition, opinion polls do not show widespread public opposition to the use of nuclear power. Figures consistently indicate that the use of nuclear power does not come high on the list of most people's main worries. Their main concerns focus on other issues such as crime and financial problems. In the main, electricity is taken for granted in the industrialised world. Electric power only becomes an issue when there is a threat of shortages.

So if public acceptance is not the main obstacle, what is? Political acceptance is an integral part of the process in which nuclear becomes "acceptable" or not. The relationship between public and political acceptance and the role of the industry in this context, on how to foster a better "dialogue", will be examined.