

Perspective on Public Opinion

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Nuclear Energy and Clean Air Benefits

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NEI's most recent public opinion tracking survey finds, once again, that contributions to environmental protection place nuclear energy in a very favorable light. Moreover, the vast majority of the more politically active public—college graduates who are registered to vote—believe that nuclear energy's clean air benefits should be recognized in government policy.

A nationally representative sample of 500 college graduates/registered voters was surveyed by telephone Aug. 30 to Sept. 6, 2000. The margin of error for the sample size of 500 is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

1. The impact of hearing a message about nuclear energy's clean air benefits is more dramatic than ever.

- ▶ Those in favor of nuclear energy rose 14 percentage points (from 61 percent to 75 percent)
- ▶ those strongly in favor rose 15 percentage points (from 20 percent to 35 percent)
- ▶ those strongly opposed dropped nearly by half (from 12 percent to 7 percent).

2. By 73 percent to 17 percent, college graduates/registered voters said that nuclear energy plants should receive the same tangible benefits for avoiding

emissions that fossil fuel plants receive for reducing emissions (9 percent were unsure).

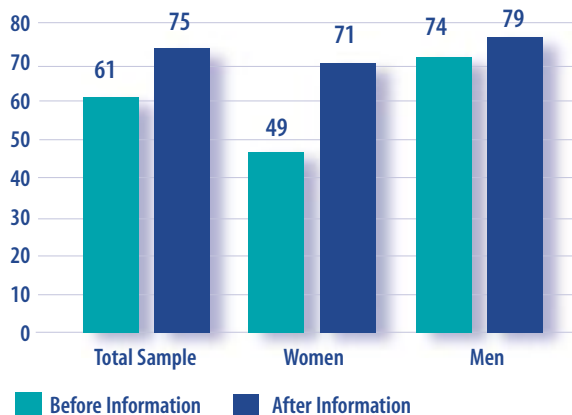
3. Almost nine out of 10 (86 percent) said that government policies affecting the continuing operation of nuclear energy plants should give importance to the fact that nuclear energy supplies one-fifth of U.S. electric power without emitting air pollution.

4. Support for continued nuclear energy growth—either through renewing licenses for existing plants or keeping the option to build new plants—remained high.

1. Impact of Clean Air Information

Nuclear energy is the second leading source of electricity and, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, produces two-thirds of all emission-free electricity in the United States.

**Percent Favoring Nuclear Energy
(Before and After Clean Air Information)**



The survey found that a large number of Americans view nuclear energy as a future electricity source but are unaware that it is one of our major sources of electricity today. Many are also unaware that nuclear energy plants do not emit greenhouse gases or other air pollutants.

Thus, when people are informed of the role nuclear energy plays in meeting electricity needs without emissions, support increases. In the latest survey, just one sentence of information produced a 14-percentage-point jump in those favoring nuclear energy.

▶ *Question before giving information:* "Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States?"

▶ *Information and question repeated:* "There are more than one hundred nuclear energy plants in the United

States that generate one-fifth of all the electricity we use in the United States without emitting any greenhouse gases or other air pollutants. Knowing this, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly

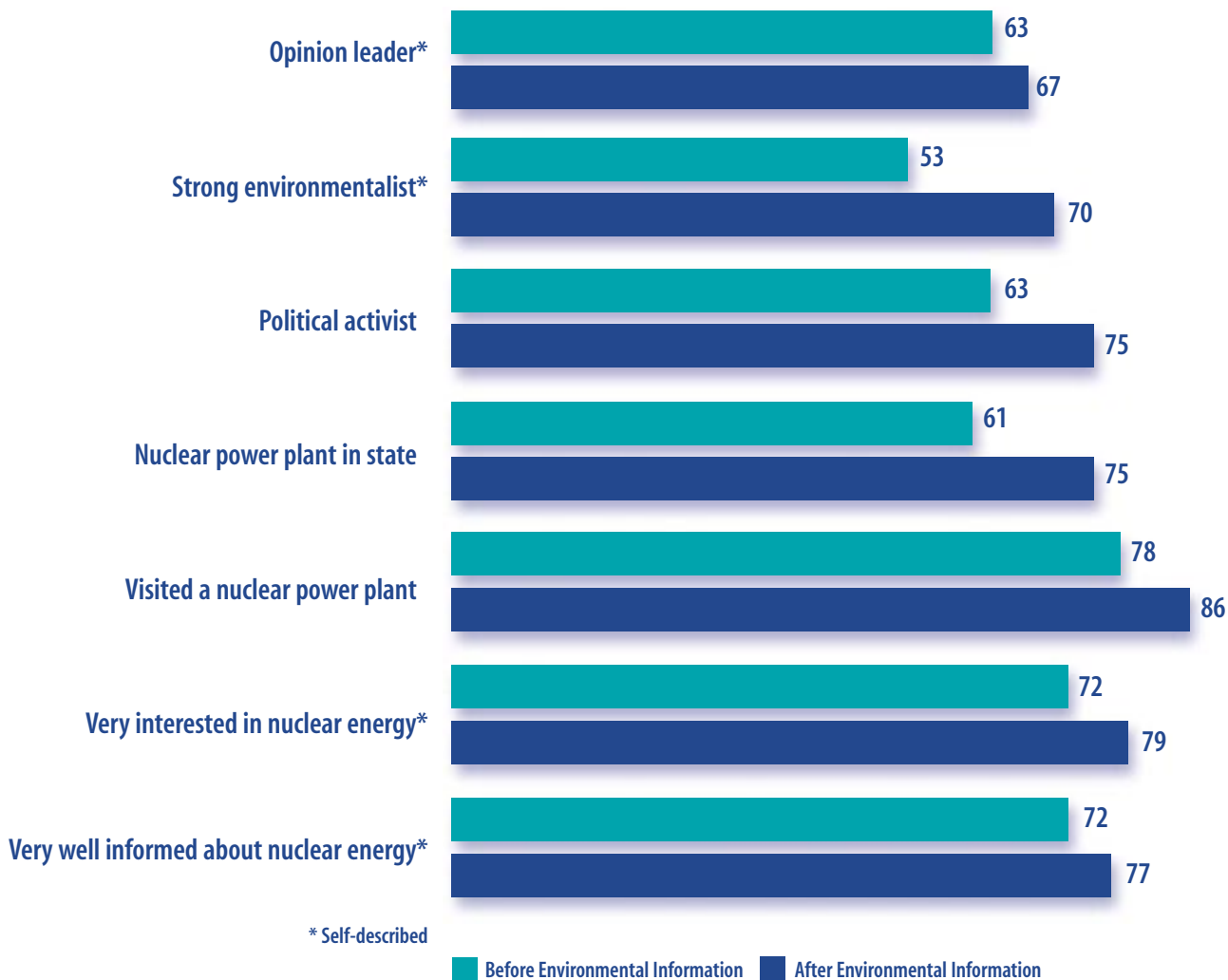
oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity and improve our air quality in the United States?"

Those strongly in favor of nuclear energy increased by 15 percentage points. Those strongly opposed dropped nearly by half.

	TOTAL SAMPLE (%)		WOMEN (%)		MEN (%)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Strongly favor	20	35	13	27	26	43
Somewhat favor	41	40	36	44	48	36
Somewhat oppose	23	15	29	19	16	12
Strongly oppose	12	7	15	7	8	6
Don't know, no answer	4	3	7	3	2	3

Percent Favoring Nuclear Energy

All groups became more favorable after hearing the one sentence of information about the clean air benefits of electricity from nuclear energy.



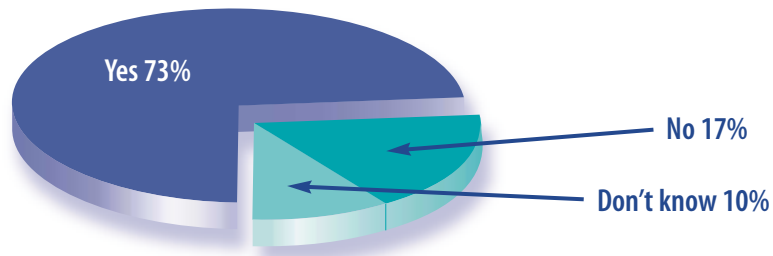
2. Tangible Benefits for Avoiding Emissions

Three-fourths of those surveyed said nuclear energy plants should receive the same tangible benefits for *avoiding* emissions altogether that fossil fuel plants receive for *reducing* emissions.

► *Question:* “Nuclear energy plants emit no air pollution or greenhouse gases while generating large amounts of electricity. This pollution avoidance helps states comply

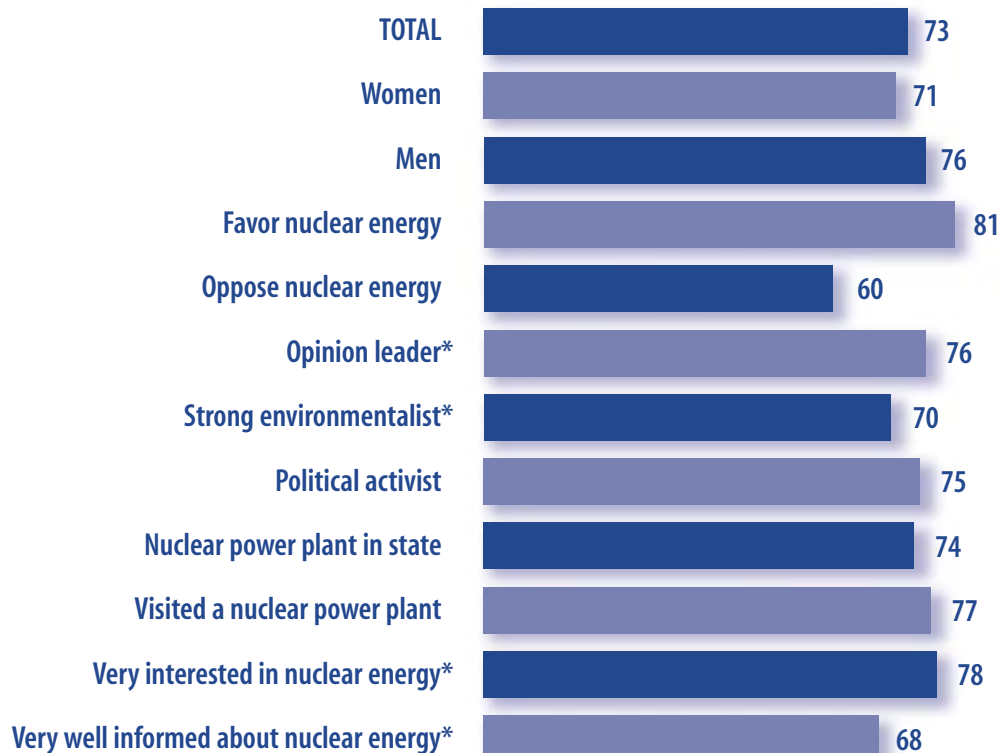
with federal Clean Air Act regulations and also limits the potentially negative effects of global climate change. Tangible benefits are earned by fossil fuel plants for *reducing* their emissions. Should similar benefits be available to nuclear energy plants for *avoiding* emissions?”

Should Nuclear Energy Plants Get Tangible Benefits for Avoiding Emissions?



Percent Saying Nuclear Energy Plants Should Get Tangible Benefits for Avoiding Emissions

There were few demographic differences among those believing nuclear power plants should get credit for avoiding emissions. Even a majority of those who said they oppose nuclear energy support this view.



* Self-described

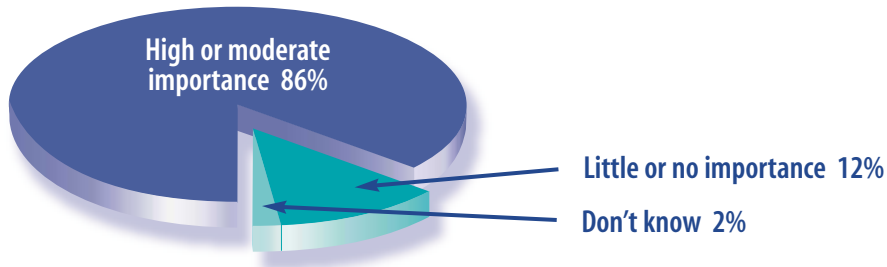
3. Policy Recognition for Clean Air Benefits

There is also strong consensus (86 percent) that government policies affecting the continuing operation of nuclear energy plants should give importance to the fact that nuclear energy supplies one-fifth of U.S. electric power without emitting air pollution.

► *Question:* “With deregulation of the electricity industry, policy decisions at the national and state level could

affect the nation’s energy mix. Nuclear energy plants meet one-fifth of the nation’s electricity needs, without producing air pollution or greenhouse gases. Should these factors be given high importance, moderate importance, only a little importance, or no importance at all in government policy decisions that could affect the continuing operation of nuclear energy plants?”

Importance Government Policy Decisions Should Give to Nuclear Energy’s Clean Air Benefits



4. Favorable Opinions Continue on Nuclear Energy Policies

Opinions about nuclear energy policies continue to be favorable—from virtual consensus on license renewal to extend the operation of today’s nuclear power plants to a majority for building new nuclear power plants.

► *Question:* “Please tell me if you personally strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?”

Percent Who Agree

