

The Blue Banner's View

Earthquake reminds US nuclear energy is unsafe

What's clean, emission-free, provides electricity and can leak cancer-causing radiation?

Nuclear power.

In 1977, Dixie Lee Ray, then governor of Washington at the time, said, "A nuclear power plant is infinitely safer than eating because 300 people choke to death on food every year."

Three hundred people did not die in the incident at Three Mile Island. Less than 30 people died because of the disaster in Chernobyl. So far, no deaths in Japan have been linked to the meltdown of reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

But does that make it safe? Signs point to 'no.'

According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, exposure to high doses of nuclear radiation can have significant contribution to several types

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of cancers such as leukemia, breast, lung and ovarian.

On March 17, President Obama made a speech in which he said a powerful natural disaster caused "even more catastrophe through its impact on nuclear reactors that bring peaceful energy to the people of Japan."

Is it really possible to call an energy source with the potential to leak radiation into food, water and air "peaceful?"

The Nuclear Energy Institute

reports 20 percent of electricity in the United States comes from nuclear energy, and is the number one source of emission-free electricity.

Nuclear power could be an answer to the rising carbon dioxide emissions caused by burning fossil fuels, but do not call it safe or peaceful.

Since the nuclear disaster in Japan, the NRC has launched a review into the current nuclear power plants in the U.S. to ensure they are all up to safety

standards.

But the American people may not be so assured by this review or the comments insisting nuclear power is both clean and safe.

In response to the earthquake in Japan, more Americans oppose the expansion of nuclear power.

A recent poll by the Pew Research Center shows 52 percent of Americans are currently opposed to the expansion of nuclear power, a 5 percent increase since October.

A similar poll from CNN reports one in 10 Americans are calling for all nuclear plants to be shut down.

Shutting down nuclear power probably is not the answer.

Losing the source of 20 percent of America's electricity would cause more problems than it would solve.

But that does not change the fact that nuclear power can come with some serious side effects.

The Oconee power plant in South Carolina received notices of violation from the NRC just last year.

Nuclear power has to be sufficiently regulated if the U.S. continues to use it, and even more so if they plan to expand.

History is teaching us not to underestimate the damage nuclear power can cause. Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and now the disaster in Japan are proving this.

Any country that uses nuclear energy needs to learn a valuable lesson from these disasters.

The only way nuclear energy can be safe is to ensure that nuclear power plants can withstand even the most unexpected disasters.

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The Blue Banner is a designated forum for free speech and welcomes letters to the editor, considering them on basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be emailed to the editor-in-chief or the appropriate section editor.

Letters should include the writer's name, year in school, and major or other relationship to UNCA. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles are subject to editing.