

Nuclear Roulette

Review of Gar Smith's new book, *Nuclear Roulette: The Truth About the Most Dangerous Energy Source on Earth*

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As the [Coalition Against Nukes](#) prepares for a series of events in Washington, D.C., September 20-22, including a Capitol Hill rally, a Congressional briefing, a fundraiser at Busboys and Poets, a ceremony at the Museum of the American Indian, a rally at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), a film screening, and a strategy session, the time seems ideal to take in the wisdom of Gar Smith's new book, *Nuclear Roulette: The Truth About the Most Dangerous Energy Source on Earth*.

Most dangerous indeed, and most useless, most inefficient, most destructive, and dumbest. How does nuclear energy make the human species look like the stupidest concoction since the platypus? Let me count the ways:

1. After the mining, processing, and shipping of uranium, and the plant construction, maintenance, and deconstruction, a nuclear plant only produces about as much energy as went into it — not counting the need to store the only thing it actually produces (radioactive waste) for hundreds of thousands of years — and not counting the sacrifice of areas of the earth, including those poisoned with uranium, which has a half life of 4.5 billion years and causes lung cancer, bone cancer, and kidney failure.
2. Wind, solar, hydro, and geothermal have far better net energy ratios.
3. If nuclear power actually worked against climate change, that fact would not be useful, because there is no way enough nuclear power plants to significantly contribute to the required difference could be built quickly enough.



4. If nuclear power plants could be built quickly enough, that wouldn't matter, because the financial cost is prohibitive. Only with multi-billion-dollar bailouts from the government can a tiny number of nuclear plants be considered for construction at all. The sainted Private Marketplace of Freedom will never touch nuclear construction on its own — or insure it. And the small number of jobs created by the "Job Creator" lobbyists who push for the generous public loan guarantees mostly show up in Japanese and French nuclear companies, thus depriving the whole enterprise of its anti-foreign-oil xenophobic appeal. (Not to mention, most of the uranium used in U.S. nuclear plants comes from abroad just like oil.) Deconstructing the plants when they grow too old to operate costs so much that the job is routinely and recklessly put off — and that doesn't count the fairly common expense of compensating the victims of accidents.

5. The nuclear industry is in debt up to its ears already, without our feeding its habit any longer. For example, Washington State's Hanford Nuclear Reservation has dumped 1.7 trillion gallons of contaminated waste into unlined trenches. The latest plan to try to deal with the mess comes with a \$12.3 billion price tag.
6. Even if nuclear power worked when it worked, it's remarkably unreliable. Between 2003 and 2007, U.S. nuclear plants were shut down 10.6 percent of the time, compared to 1 or 2 percent for solar stations and wind farms.
7. Nuclear power produces greenhouse gases in the mining, production, deconstruction, shipping, and waste storage processes. It also discharges 1000 degree Fahrenheit steam directly into the atmosphere. Considering the entire fuel cycle, a nuclear reactor burning high-grade uranium produces about a third as much carbon dioxide as a gas-fired power plant. As high-grade uranium runs out, low-grade ore will result in a nuclear plant producing just as much carbon dioxide as a gas plant.
8. Climate change may have reached a tipping point. Radioactivity could as well. Birds and insects near Chernobyl are adapting. Humans, too, may be beginning to evolve within the Radiocene era to which the earth has been condemned.
9. Climate change limits nuclear energy, as the heat forces plants to shut down for lack of cool water.
10. The Three Mile Island disaster killed birds, bees, and livestock. Pets were born dead or deformed. In humans, cancer, leukemia, and birth defects spread. Chernobyl gave cancer to about a million people. Fukushima looks to be far worse. Meltdowns and other major malfunctions are common, in the United States and abroad. Gar Smith documents dozens. The worst nuclear disaster in the United States was in Simi Valley, California, and no one was told about it. The rates of disease and death led residents to investigate. I shouldn't use the past tense; the disaster is still there and not going anywhere in the span of human attention.
11. The rate of break downs and failures thus far is very likely to grow as nuclear plants age. Meanwhile, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), subservient to the nuclear profiteers, is drastically reducing safety standards.
12. In the normal course of proper nuclear power production, the water, air, and earth are poisoned.
13. The NRC publicly dismisses concerns about earthquakes, but privately panics. Earthquakes are on the rise. Fracking may cause even more of them. Fukushima should scare us all; but closer to home, a plant at Lake Anna, in Virginia, was shut down by an earthquake last year, possibly caused by fracking, and the first response was the publication of lies about the damage.
14. If anticipated solar flares (or anything else) collapse power grids, nuclear plants could overheat, melt down, or explode.
15. An average nuclear plant produces 20-30 tons of high-level waste and 70 tons of low-level waste per year. No proven long-term storage site exists. If one ever does, we won't know what language to post the warning signs in, as no human language has lasted a

fraction of the time the nuclear waste will remain deadly.

16. When a country develops nuclear energy, as the United States encouraged Iran to do in my lifetime, it brings that country very close to developing nuclear weapons, which has become a leading excuse for launching and threatening wars. It doesn't help for the CIA to give Iran plans for building a bomb, but ridding the world of that sort of stupidity is just not within our reach. Ridding the world of nukes needs to take priority.

17. There is no purpose in a nation developing nuclear weapons if it wants to target an enemy that possesses nuclear power plants. Sitting duck nuclear catastrophes waiting to happen — by accident or malice — exist in the form of nuclear power plants within 50 miles of 108 million people in the United States. Nuclear reactors could have been somewhat protected by being built underground, but that would have cost more. Haruki Murakami, a Japanese novelist, commented on Fukushima: "This time no one dropped a bomb on us. . . . We set the stage, we committed the crime with our own hands, we are destroying our own lands, and we are destroying our own lives."

18. The latest designs in nuclear reactors don't change points 1-17.

19. The Associated Press in 2011 found that, "Federal regulators [at the NRC] have been working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards, or simply failing to enforce them."

20. [Helping to shake the nuke habit](#) would take 30 seconds and be ridiculously easy, and yet many won't do it.

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