

Plant sites shown in map are highlighted in news stories in this section

CLEAN AIR BENEFIT

Survey respondents give good grades to nuclear

THE MORE INFORMATION that is conveyed about the environmental benefit of nuclear power, the greater support it receives from a key segment of society.

Results of a survey released by the Nuclear Energy Institute in September found that college graduates in the United States who are registered to vote are more likely to support nuclear energy once they hear of its environmental benefit. A sample of 500 college graduates/voters was surveyed by telephone from August 30 to September 6. Bisconti Research, Inc., of Washington, D.C., conducted the survey for NEI.

The impact of hearing a message about nuclear energy's environmental benefit was more dramatic than ever, according to the survey results. Before information was given about nuclear power, 61 percent of those polled were already in favor of it. After environmental information was revealed, however, those favoring nuclear energy zoomed 14 percent, up to 75 percent overall. Of women polled, 71 percent favored nuclear after hearing of its benefit, as compared with 49 percent before the information was revealed. For men, the numbers were 78 percent after and 73 percent before.

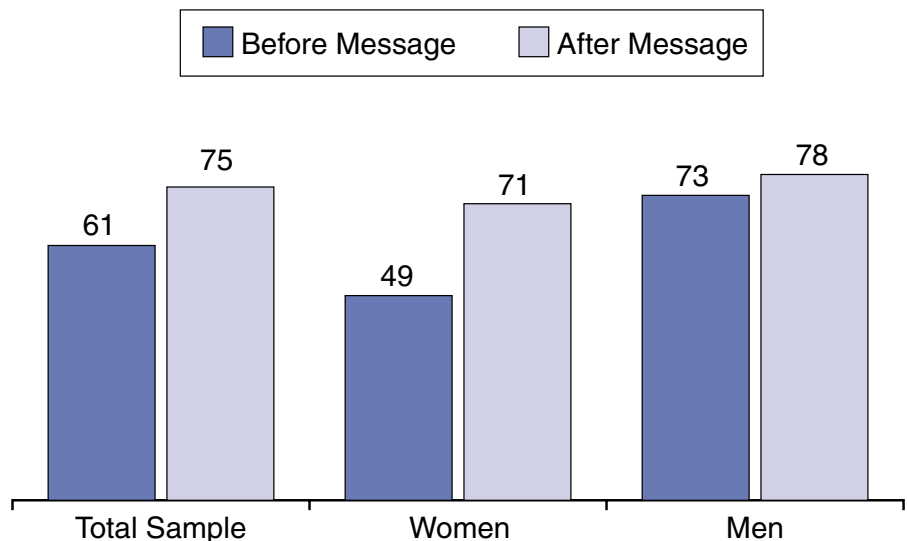
Numbers increased from 20 percent to 35 percent for those "strongly in favor" of nuclear, while those "strongly opposed" were cut from 12 percent to 7 percent once the environmental benefit was known.

On the question of whether nuclear plants should receive the same tangible benefits for

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avoiding emissions that fossil fuel plants receive for reducing emissions, 73 percent said yes, while 17 percent said no (the remaining were unsure).

By three to one, the college graduates/voters agreed that if the federal government's studies conclude that the site in Nevada is suitable for a disposal facility for radioactive



Percentage of survey respondents favoring nuclear energy before and after hearing a message about its environmental benefits (Source: Adapted from NEI)

waste from the nation's nuclear power plants, the president should approve the facility being built there—66 percent yes, 22 percent no, 12 percent unsure.

Only 9 percent said they felt “very well informed” about nuclear energy, which led the survey report to note that “the continuing gaps in knowledge and awareness and continuing need for communications are large.” Other factors pointing to the need for communications with the general public include:

■ Only 12 percent mentioned nuclear energy as one of the sources of electricity used most in the U.S. today. About three times as many mentioned coal (38 percent), hydro (35 percent), and natural gas (34 percent). Oil was mentioned by 18 percent.

■ Only 16 percent estimated the number of nuclear plants at 100 or more. More than half guessed 50 or fewer, and one-fifth had no idea.

■ Nuclear energy was mentioned by 32 percent as one of the sources that will be used most in the United States in 15 years—more than any other source. Expectations are also high for solar and hydro, while low for all the fossil fuels.

■ Only 17 percent thought of nuclear energy as one of the sources of electricity that helps keep the air clean because it does not emit air pollution. Half of the respondents mentioned solar and wind, and 28 percent mentioned hydro. Also, 6 percent mentioned natural gas and 3 percent coal.

■ Only 17 percent thought that most people in their community are in favor of nuclear energy, while 57 percent thought most are opposed, and 26 percent are unsure.

■ Most Americans continue to be unfamiliar with waste issues, as only 24 percent of the college graduates/voters associated waste with nuclear energy plants.

Although the survey report provided no numbers for the following, it noted that fewer college graduates/voters are hearing in the media about environmental issues related to nuclear energy's clean air benefits, and that the numbers hearing this information have been declining since 1998 and the Kyoto convention.