

## Fukushima boosts green case for nuclear

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[The accident at Fukushima](#) was a test for the global environmental movement. Concern about global warming over the past decade led many greens to reconsider their long-standing opposition to nuclear power. But old habits die hard. Caught between their anti-nuclear sentiments and their increasingly apocalyptic fears of global warming, environmentalists have mostly made the wrong choice.

With global energy and fossil fuel use continuing to grow, and international efforts to place a cap on carbon emissions in shambles, many greens viewed the Fukushima as a seemingly straightforward environmental menace – and one that chalked-up quick victories, as Germany turned its back on nuclear, and China announced a moratorium. Within days of the accident anti-nuclear greens began making outsized claims about the danger to the public.

Many of these claims were wildly inaccurate, but they had their intended result. Green campaigners fell back in line. Fukushima showed that, for most environmentalists, nuclear's low-probability risks trump both the existential threat of [climate change](#) and 2m deaths annually from air pollution. Green campaigners have, ironically, fallen prey to the same misperception of risk they all too often see in a public indifferent to global warming: an obsession with dramatic but infrequent threats, while ignoring those that are banal but far more deadly.

Many greens dismiss this criticism by claiming that the choice between nuclear and fossil fuels is false. But in this, environmental hysteria about nuclear power is matched by [green delusions about renewable energy](#). Since at least the 1970s, greens have argued that wind and solar, when combined with energy efficiency, could meet our energy needs without resort to nuclear power or fossil fuels. Faith in what is called the "soft energy path" has taken on an almost religious quality among green activists. Yet, despite decades of subsidies, solar and wind still make up a tiny percentage of energy virtually everywhere in the world.

Anyone who thinks turning away from nuclear will lead to more renewables need only look at what has happened in Germany. After Fukushima, it shut down seven of its 17 nuclear plants. The result has been that emissions have risen as much as 10 per cent, according to Reuters, partly due to electricity imports from coal-burning nations such as the Czech Republic.

Germany promises that more of its future electricity will come from renewables, but if it shuts down its entire nuclear fleet the replacement power will come primarily from coal and gas. Indeed, while greens have fawned over its much-vaunted solar subsidies programme, Germany has actually been on a coal building boom, bringing 11 gigawatts of coal-fired generation online – six times the electricity it gets from solar – in the past 10 years alone.

Put simply, there is no credible path to stabilising, much less reducing, global carbon emissions without more nuclear power. We are a planet of 6bn people, heading toward 9bn. Even with better energy efficiency, global energy demand will soon double, perhaps triple. Without nuclear power, [the vast majority of that demand](#) will be met by fossil energy.

We must take seriously the risks of nuclear power: Fukushima was a serious industrial accident and we must modernise the existing nuclear fleet to account for its failure. More nuclear power will also require better and cheaper nuclear technologies, capable of displacing existing coal and gas power. We should not give up on renewables either: expanding state support for clean-energy innovation, nuclear and non-nuclear alike, must be a priority if we are to wean the world off fossil fuels and meet a dramatically rising global energy demand in the coming decades.

But if Fukushima has proved anything, it is that leadership to meet these two crucial goals is unlikely to come from those environmental campaigners who want them most of all.

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