

Accompanying Statement to QEW Nuclear Power Minute

The context for our actions as Friends and members of Quaker Earthcare Witness at this critical juncture of planetary history is multifold—spiritual, economic, political, and biospheric. John Woolman was alert to the seeds of slavery and war in everyday economic actions. Today, slavery comes from that state of misguided human greed in which all of nature is enslaved to our industrial society and global capitalism. In an era when the bottom line is profit and the side effect is destruction of the planet in the form of greenhouse gases and other toxic wastes, the overall moral issue is how we care for the web of Creation. It is stewardship in an era when our numbers are overwhelming Gaia, multiplied by an extravagant lifestyle.

We live in a world deeply compromised by our industrial choices, and they limit the range of meaningful response to the overarching issue of climate change. Woolman lived at the beginning of the industrial age; we live at its end. By ignoring habitat restraints, we are so overextended in population and resource use that both clamping down on further increases in CO₂ and righting the scales of justice for the billions of poor may not be possible. For those who believe that we can provide enough energy by increasing renewable sources and using efficiency and conservation, profound caution is needed. Even with all these strategies, we may not be able to provide needed energy by 2050 (assuming we progressively shut down fossil fuel plants and decommission aging nuclear power plants). This is a particular challenge for developing countries.

QEW's Steering Committee has approved the following Minute on Nuclear Power, based on our values and our testimonies. As we search for ways to address energy issues, including the use of efficiency and renewable energy as urged by this Minute, we must be aware of the challenge that the world's growth-oriented economic system poses. Because of U. S. fiscal policies, including almost uncontrolled public and private debt and the Federal Reserve's inflationary response to that debt, we may face an overdue global recession, making efforts to address energy difficult.

Thus, we need to adopt radical simplicity in our personal lives, build local community, and exhort our political leaders to adopt powerful, globally-binding economic restraints on carbon emissions, while safeguarding the health of the biosphere and humans.

Bob McGahey and Roy C. Treadway, for the QEW Steering Committee

Quaker Earthcare Witness Minute on Nuclear Power

Approved by the Steering Committee of Quaker Earthcare Witness
in session, October 14, 2007, Burlington, Vermont.

Quaker Earthcare Witness cannot support nuclear power as part of the solution to harmful climate change.

As Friends, our peace testimony has long led us to witness against nuclear power because of its connection to nuclear war. Our deep caring for all creation leads us to affirm that witness, even in the face of growing calls for an expansion of nuclear power.

Based on everything we know about the current state of nuclear technology and our understanding of its impact and risks for people and the earth, we are strongly opposed—for moral, spiritual, and practical reasons—to current efforts to increase nuclear power. Additionally, we are strongly opposed to subsidies for funding new nuclear power plants, including proposed loan guarantees such as those in energy bills currently being considered by the U.S. Congress.

While nuclear power produces no greenhouse gases during electricity generation, in fact significant amounts of greenhouse gases are emitted when the complete cycle of nuclear power—from mining, milling, enrichment of uranium, transportation of nuclear fuel, and removal and guarding of nuclear wastes, as well as construction of nuclear power plants—is considered.

Nuclear power is extremely expensive when all costs, including subsidies, are included. We believe that funds proposed for more nuclear power plants would be far more effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions if used for energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable power.

Nuclear power is closely linked to the war machine in many countries. The cumulative effects of radioactive waste from nuclear power will be lethal, carcinogenic, and mutagenic to humans and all species for hundreds of thousands of years. Finally, given nuclear power's unique destructiveness, the risk of just one catastrophic accident anywhere in the world renders nuclear power unacceptable.

QEW also affirms that providing more energy to support unconstrained economic growth is neither inevitable nor desirable.

We accept the responsibility of working for all socially responsible and environmentally sound solutions to global climate change, including phasing-out the use of oil, coal, and gas; and increasing energy efficiency, energy conservation; and renewable sources of energy. We accept the responsibility for using less energy in all that we do and for working to make reduction of energy use a goal for society at large.

(Jack Bradin, SEYM, wishes to be recorded as standing aside.)