RESEARCH BY BRITISH NUCLEAR INDUSTRY FORUM

INTO PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NUCLEAR POWER

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A. PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO NUCLEAR ISSUES

The need for nuclear electricity

1. The public is in two minds about nuclear electricity. On the one hand research shows that there is an acceptance of the need for nuclear electricity. When told that nuclear power is used to generate approximately 20% of the country's electricity, nearly two-thirds of adults (61%) agree that nuclear power is necessary to some extent in the United Kingdom.

The necessity of nuclear electricity in the UK

Base: all adults	680	
	%	
Nuclear power is ...		
Essential	13 }	
Necessary to a large extent	16 }	61%
Necessary to a limited extent	32 }	
Not necessary at all	31	
Don't know	9	

Notes:
Fieldwork: February - March 1993
Source: Gallup

The importance of a balanced energy policy

2. The public is aware of the importance of not being too dependent on the use of any single fuel to generate electricity. When reminded that a balanced energy policy seeks to secure continuous supplies of electricity and to minimise the impact of short term increases in fuel costs, the overwhelming majority of the population (95%) recognises that a balanced energy policy is important.

Importance of the UK having a balanced energy policy

Base: all adults	641	
	%	
A balanced energy policy is ...		
Very important	70 }	
Quite important	25 }	95%
Not very important	3	
Not at all important	2	
Not answered	1	

Notes:
Fieldwork: February - March 1993
Source: Gallup

However, despite the importance of the country having a balanced energy policy, only a minority of adults (20%) believe that the UK has such a policy:

Whether the UK has a balanced energy policy

Base: all adults	641
	%
Yes	20
No	55
Don't know	26

Notes:
Fieldwork: February - March 1993
Source: Gallup

3. The majority of adults (58%) is in favour of nuclear electricity making a contribution to a balanced energy policy, particularly if reassurances about operating safety and the safe disposal of nuclear waste are forthcoming. Indeed, if these reassurances were sufficiently persuasive, nearly three-quarters of adults (71%) would accept the contribution of nuclear energy to a balanced energy policy.

Should nuclear contribute to a balanced energy policy ?

Base: all adults	478		
	%		
Should nuclear have a role?			
Yes, definitely in favour	22 }		}
Yes, if the following conditions are met ...	36 }	58%	}
No, unless I am assured that ...	13		} 71%
No, definitely not in favour	24		
Don't know	6		

Notes:
Fieldwork: March 1993
Source: Gallup

Concern about nuclear issues

4. There is very little *unprompted* concern among the public about the nuclear industry. Nuclear issues do not preoccupy the attention of the public. As an item of top-of-mind concern, the nuclear industry has a negligible presence in the minds of the public. Only 2% of adults cite nuclear waste as the most important problem facing Britain today compared with unemployment (55%), the economy (17%), law and order (15%), homelessness (14%) and the National Health Service (12%).

Nuclear issues and the environment

5. This low level of concern is also apparent when people are asked to name the issues to do with the environment and conservation of most concern to them. The proportions of the population citing nuclear power stations (4%) or nuclear waste (1%) are much smaller than those who are concerned about problems of pollution of the atmosphere and of the rivers and seas.

Environment and conservation issues of most concern

Base:	all adults	1923
		%
Concerned about ...		
	Pollution of rivers/streams/water	16
	Destruction of ozone layer/aerosols/CFCs	16
	Air pollution	13
	Pollution (general)	11
	Exhaust fumes from cars/trucks	11
	Litter in street/countryside	9
	Destruction of rainforests/deforestation	7
	Pollution at sea/waste disposal at sea	7
	Loss of green belt/overbuilding	7
	Greenhouse effect/global warming	6
	Recycling	5
	Industrial pollution	5
*	Power stations/nuclear power	4
	Preservation of wildlife	3
	pollution of beaches/coastline	3
	Toxic/chemical waste	3

	Waste disposal	3
	Crop spraying/use of insecticides	2
	Acid rain	2
	Loss of natural resources	2
*	Nuclear waste	1

Notes:
Fieldwork: 1992
Source: MORI

6. When attention is drawn specifically to the subject of pollution, the same pattern of concern is apparent. Mentions of nuclear waste or nuclear power are at a low level, especially when compared with those for road transport, industry and chemical pollution and pollution of the atmosphere.

Types of pollution of most concern (spontaneous mentions)

Base: those concerned about the environment	961
	%
Concerned about ...	
Car exhausts/traffic	32
Industrial/chemical pollution	16
Air pollution	12
Destruction of the ozone layer	10
Sea/river pollution	5
Nuclear waste disposal	5
Nuclear power/radioactive leaks	2
Greenhouse effect	4
Acid rain	1
Agriculture/intensive farming	1
Other	7
Don't know	5

Notes:
Fieldwork: March 1993
Source Gallup

7. Even when the public is shown a list of industries and asked to say how much damage each does to the environment, fewer point to the nuclear *industry* than to the chemical, oil and road transport industries. Nuclear *electricity* is better regarded than the nuclear industry and is on a par with coal- and oil-generated electricity in this respect.

Industries causing a major/a fair amount of harm to the environment

Base: all adults	1923
	%
Industries causing harm ...	
Chemical	74
Petrol and oil products	70
Road transport	66
Nuclear	60
Oil exploration and production	56
Agrochemical	55
Plastics	51
Electricity generated from coal- and oil-fired power stations	51
Electricity generated from nuclear power stations	49

Notes:
Fieldwork: 1992
Source: MORI

8. More people think that the nuclear *industry* is 'trying to reduce any harmful effects its activities might have on the environment' than think this about any other industry. And nuclear electricity is better-rated- in this respect than coal- and oil-generated electricity:

Industries doing a great deal/a fair amount to reduce the harm they do to the environment

Base: all adults	1923
	%
Nuclear	31
Petrol and oil products	29
Electricity generated from nuclear power stations	28
Water services	27
Oil separation and production	26
Gas	25
Chemical	25
Electricity generated from coal- and oil-fired power stations	23

Notes:
Fieldwork: 1992
Source: MORI

The importance of information about nuclear electricity

9. There is much evidence to suggest that the more knowledge individuals have about nuclear topics, the more likely it is they will be in favour of using nuclear power to generate electricity. Although this appears as a positive correlation in the research, rather than a clear causative link it remains a powerful justification for the advertising, education and promotional activities of companies in the nuclear industry and of its trade associations.

10. In 1992, a sample of members of the public was shown a series of statements about radiation (for example: 'Radiation causes acid rain') and were asked whether each were true or false. The higher the number of correct answers given by any individual, the more likely it was that the individual was in favour of generating electricity from nuclear power.

	Proportion 'in favour' of nuclear electricity
Base: all adults	1437
	%
Level of knowledge ...	
Very high	68
High	52
Upper medium	37
Lower medium	29
Low	23
Very low	17

Notes:
Fieldwork: 1992
Source: MORI

11. Research undertaken by British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield shows that visitors to the power station become more favourably disposed to the nuclear power industry after a tour of the visitor's centre.

How a visit to Sellafield influences attitudes

Base: all visitors	347
Those favourable ...	%
Before visit	50
After visit	69
How favourable after visit ...	
More	27
Less	2

Notes:
Fieldwork: 1992
Source: MORI

12. When information is provided about the advantages and disadvantages of using coal, oil and nuclear power to generate electricity, more people favour the use of nuclear power than they do when no such information is supplied. It also implies that as familiarity grows, so will support (just as apprehensions about the safety of electricity, the railways etc. has historically decreased).

Drawing attention to the advantages of nuclear power, which are not widely known, and to its disadvantages, which are well known, results in a level of favourability to nuclear electricity (47%) which is similar to that for coal. The questions used were as follows:

a. Advantages and disadvantages mentioned

Q. Much of the carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and other pollutants in the atmosphere come from burning coal to make electricity. Which of the statements on this card best describes you attitude to Britain producing electricity from coal- and oil-fired power stations ?

Q. By contrast with coal- and oil-fired power stations, nuclear power stations, which make just over 20% of Britain's electricity, produce virtually no carbon dioxide or atmospheric pollutants. They do, however, produce small quantities of waste. Which of the statements on this card best describes your attitude to Britain producing electricity from nuclear power stations ?

b. No mention of advantages and disadvantages

Q. Are you in favour or not in favour of Britain producing electricity from nuclear power stations/from coal-fired power stations?

	Attitude to use of fuel when information is...			
	Provided		**Not provided**	
	Coal	**Nuclear**	**Coal**	**Nuclear**
Base: all adults	971	971	950	950
	%	%	%	%
In favour	50	47	53	34
Not in favour	37	43	24	46
Don't know	13	10	24	20

Notes:
Fieldwork: May - July 1992
Source: Gallup

B. EXPERTS' ATTITUDES TO NUCLEAR POWER

1. In September 1992 the British Nuclear Industry commissioned an independent assessment of the attitudes of 'experts' to energy matters in general and to nuclear matters in particular. These experts were drawn from the following groups:

Government	Regional electricity companies
Local government	Media
Political parties	Pressure groups
Business/industry	Regional development councils
Financial community	Academics

2. The report on the attitudes of experts made the following points:

a. The majority of experts adopt a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach to nuclear power. Only the environmental pressure groups and a very small minority of other experts are ideologically opposed to nuclear power, reflecting concerns with its military origins and connections, and risks to the environment.

b. For the pragmatic majority, nuclear power has a role to play as part of a balanced energy strategy. It is not in the national interest to 'place all our eggs in one basket' and nuclear power is making a significant contribution to energy needs.

c. The share held by individual fuels at any one time would be determined by market forces and thus, for the majority, the case for, or against, the expansion of nuclear power was essentially an economic one. Nuclear power simply had to compete with other forms of energy.

d. Experts are relatively reassured by the safety record of the nuclear power industry, though they recognise that the general public are not. Experts believe that the safety standards are very high and consider that the risk of a serious accident are very low.

e. There is concern that the problems of waste management and disposal have not been resolved, but appear to hold the view that, pending a 'perfect' solution, the problems are under control. An optimistic minority believe that science will eventually find a way of eliminating the problem.

f. Safety and waste management issues are not *major* concerns for experts when considering the future development of nuclear power.