

# Nuclear power plants are not nearly as risky as some would have us believe

By ACSH Staff — August 7, 2015



Anti-nuclear activists demand that California's last electricity-

generating nuclear reactor the Diablo Canyon plant be shut down based on a host of illusory concerns. But do their claims about the risks to human health and the environment really hold water? A detailed [rebuttal](#) [1] to their fear-generating statements appeared recently on *The Breakthrough*. Here we briefly summarize some of the claims and counter-claims.

Diablo Canyon's use of seawater for cooling impacts local fish populations killing about 5,000 adult fish per year undoubtedly a negative environmental effect. But wind turbines also wreak havoc on the environment, killing hundreds of thousands of birds and bats each year a fact that advocates of renewables always ignore. And solar panel farms can create so much reflected heat that birds flying over them are simply fried.

Ever since atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (70 years ago this week) many have been understandably leery of the destructive power of nuclear energy. And the anti-nuclear activists are playing on such fears, pointing to the disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima as examples of radiation hazards to human health. Yet neither of these breakdowns have or will significantly affect human health. As noted by ACSH senior medical director, Dr. Gilbert Ross:

*The only **nuclear accident** with measurable impact on human life and health occurred as a result of the Chernobyl explosion in April of 1986, which released large amounts of radionuclides into the forests, farms and rivers of Ukraine and Belarus. Yet, the death toll due to **radiation** from the highly-unlikely constellation of bad-planning, incompetence and bad-luck in that Soviet-era reactor has been calculated to be 31 thirty-one dead workers, immediately from the explosion and among heroic fire-fighters. Some groups such as devoted anti-nuclear activists, Greenpeace and Union of Concerned Scientists predicted thousands more from various radiation-related ailments, but other than an uptick in cases (not deaths) of thyroid cancer (likely due to better case-seeking/outreach and diagnosis), no late-term radiation-related outcomes have been detected.*

Although it's true that part of the problem at the Fukushima plant was due to earthquake activity, the major part of the damage was caused by the resulting tsunami. Diablo Canyon is over 85 feet

above sea level more than twice the height of the Fukushima wave. Further, the plant has been built to withstand quakes of the size experienced by the Fukushima plant.

Environmentalists want to replace nuclear-generated electricity by wind or solar power. But to replace the amount of power produced by Diablo Canyon with solar power would require the state to pave a whopping 90 square miles of land. It would be more likely that, if Diablo Canyon were shuttered, some substantial portion of the electricity it had produced would then be sourced from natural gas, thus upping the state's carbon footprint.

It's ironic that activists who supposedly want green and clean energy sources are agitating to get rid of the main source of such energy, said Dr. Ruth Kava, ACSH senior nutrition fellow. She continued By exaggerating the risks of nuclear energy they are promoting regulation based on fear, not on scientific facts and their agenda for environmentally sound energy sources will be confounded.

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[1] <http://thebreakthrough.org/index.php/issues/nuclear/diablo-canyon-nuclear-power-shutdown-risk>