

# Nuclear Energy: A Compendium (C-12023)



**Nuclear Energy: A Compendium**

This Compendium focuses exclusively on nuclear energy. For in-depth information on the related issue of nuclear waste, consult Nuclear Waste: A Compendium, Order No. C-12024.

This nuclear energy Compendium includes sections on topics including U.S. federal government nuclear energy policy, nuclear energy cooperation with foreign countries, nuclear plant design and security, and funding.

Nuclear energy is viewed by its supporters as a virtually inexhaustible and clean source of power. But the industry has been hampered by construction cost overruns, delays by regulators and interveners, concerns about nuclear weapons proliferation, and controversy over nuclear waste disposal. But as the price of conventional fossil fuels has grown more volatile, the economics of nuclear power have begun to appear more attractive. In addition, concern about carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels, particularly coal, has led some former critics of nuclear energy to reconsider its merits.

Federal incentives may play a key role in the future of U.S. nuclear power. Under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-58), new reactors are eligible for tax credits, loan guarantees, and payments for regulatory delays. Those incentives — combined with volatile fossil fuel prices and carbon dioxide concerns — have led to license applications for more than two dozen new power reactors. Proposals for additional federal incentives, such as increased loan guarantees, are likely to be a major subject of congressional debate.

Safety has been a fundamental issue for nuclear power since its inception. Congressional concern about nuclear power plant safety since 2001 has focused particularly on the potential consequences of terrorist attacks. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 included several significant nuclear security measures that had been debated since the attacks. Other safety issues have also unexpectedly arisen from time to time, despite the good safety record of most plants in recent years.

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