

# Bill supports expanding dangerous, costly nuke power

The Energy Security and Affordability Act is now being considered by state legislators. The bill would allow the state to request proposals to build new nuclear reactors and fund any qualified proposal. If it becomes law, New Jersey would suffer – as nuclear power is very expensive and hazardous to public health.

Lenders stopped supporting nuclear power in the 1970s, as it proved very costly. The attempted nuclear “renaissance” of the early 2000s resulted in cancellation of 29 of 31 proposed new reactors due to massive cost overruns. One cancellation in South Carolina was abandoned in 2017, after spending \$9 billion (covered by ratepayers) and with four executives sentenced to prison for fraud.

The only two U.S. reactors proposed and completed in the past half century recently began operating at the Vogtle plant in Georgia after 18 years of planning and construction put the project far behind schedule. The original

cost estimate of \$14 billion had ballooned to \$37 billion, also added to electric bills.

Current proposals for new reactors are mostly for small modular reactors (SMR) that promise greater efficiency – a promise not supported thus far. In 2014, NuScale Power proposed 12 units for a new SMR plant in Utah, later cut to six due to lack of interest. The proposed cost of \$3 billion had climbed to \$9.3 billion by 2023, and the project was canceled. Only two SMRs exist in the world, one each in Russia and China; both are for research and do not produce electricity.

Nuclear power has also proved to be dangerous. Supporters call reactors “zero emission” energy, despite the fact they produce over 100 radioactive chemicals after splitting uranium atoms – the same chemicals found in atomic bomb test fallout. Catastrophic meltdowns have occurred at the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear plants. In addition, all reactors must routinely release a portion of their

radioactive gases and particles into the local environment. Each of these chemicals enters the body through breathing, food and water, raising risk of cancer, birth defects and other diseases.

Supporters of expanded nuclear power also state it is a solution to the global warming problem – another unsupported claim. Reactors use massive amounts of local water every day from lakes, rivers or oceans for cooling radioactivity in the core. They return water to local sources at a much higher temperature, heating the water and killing aquatic species. In addition, generating uranium fuel for reactors involves the processes of mining, milling, enrichment, fabrication and purification – each of which adds large amounts of greenhouse gases to the environment. Like current reactors, new SMRs would use uranium as a fuel.

New Jersey has extensive experience with nuclear power. The state generates most of its electricity from natural gas (49%)

or nuclear (42%) from three reactors at the Salem and Hope Creek plants in Salem County. In the past six years, the New Jersey Legislature has allowed utilities to add \$1.8 billion to ratepayer bills due to rising maintenance costs of aging reactors. Such “bailouts” have also occurred in several other states. The federal Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 includes up to \$135 billion nationally to support new or aging reactors.

Health hazards of routine environmental emissions from nuclear plants can be observed in Salem County. Until the late 1980s, before and just after the three reactors there began operating, the county’s cancer death rate was slightly below the state rate. But since then, the county rate has been higher – peaking at 33% higher most recently. This change means 1,200 cancer deaths have been “excess,” a huge number in a small, rural county. The adjoining downwind counties of Cumberland and Gloucester

have experienced similar changes.

New Jersey has so far missed out on meeting its electricity needs in a less costly and non-hazardous way. Renewable energy, mostly wind and solar power, have expanded dramatically in other states, and now account for 26% of U.S. electricity. In the past year, over two-thirds of the electricity generated in seven states were from renewable sources. The cost of new nuclear power is about five times greater than the cost of new wind and solar power – without health hazards posed by nuclear.

Expanding nuclear power would be very costly and harmful to health. The people of New Jersey would be much better served by a committed program of developing more power by much safer and much less expensive renewable sources.

*Joseph Mangano is an epidemiologist and executive director of the Radiation and Public Health Project.*

Press of Atlantic City  
February 21, 2026