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SURVEY SHOWS EUROPEANS FAVOR RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

Many Europeans are afraid of nuclear power and strongly prefer developing renewable energy sources as a solution to the energy crisis, according to a survey of citizens in the 10 member states of the European Community.

Those interviewed were particularly concerned about the dangers of radioactive waste storage (57 percent) and radioactive emissions (51 percent). A substantial minority (38 percent) said a bomb-like explosion at a nuclear power plant was somewhat or very possible.

When asked to name the most appropriate solution to energy shortages, 70 percent selected development of renewable energy sources, such as solar or tidal power, as their first or second choice. By contrast, only 23 percent ranked expansion of nuclear power that high. Those findings suggest that Europeans have a "strong emotional response" to energy problems, a report on the survey states. By turning to renewable resources, it explains, they are supporting the most romantic, yet - technically and economically - the least readily available option.

The questions about nuclear power were part of a 1982 survey on energy issues involving 9,700 individuals in Belgium, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The results are described in the report "Public Opinion in the European Community: Energy," which was recently released by the Commission of the European Communities.

Given a choice between further development of nuclear power and no further development, 38 percent said yes, while 37 percent said the "risks involved are unacceptable." In general, attitudes were more favorable in countries with highly developed nuclear capacities. For example, in France, the most advanced Community nation in the nuclear field, the majority supported

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development of nuclear power. But in Ireland and Greece, where there were no nuclear power plants at the time of the survey, three times as many people opposed the nuclear option as favored it. "Nuclear energy is only really accepted once it has been developed on a sufficient scale," the report concludes.

Citizens in advanced nuclear nations were also less fearful of nuclear power, and they were less supportive of anti-nuclear movements. Overall, however, nearly half of those surveyed said they approved of such movements. Favorable attitudes toward nuclear power were found among citizens with right-wing political views, men, older people, higher-income groups and those with advanced education. The opposite groups generally expressed negative views.

The energy survey also produced these findings:

SAVING ENERGY. More than 90 percent of those interviewed said they had taken at least one energy-saving measure in recent years. Forty-four percent had improved the insulation in their homes, while 55 percent had used less heat, 53 percent less electricity and 39 percent less gasoline.

CONCERN ABOUT ENERGY SUPPLIES. Sixty-four percent agreed that their country faced a very serious or fairly serious energy problem. But those consuming the most energy and living in the richest countries tended to play down energy problems, "as if the possibility of a crisis had nothing to do with their own consumption," the report notes. Italians are low energy consumers, for example, but they expressed the most concern about energy shortages. Residents of Luxembourg and the Netherlands, on the other hand, were the least concerned - although they possess the greatest proportion of energy-consuming appliances within the Community. Young people, particularly those in the 15-19 age group, were much more aware of energy problems than older people.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY. A majority of those surveyed said national governments should be responsible for energy research and nuclear plant safety, but about one-fourth assigned responsibility to the Community. Citizens of Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands were most willing to give the Community responsibility.

The energy survey was coordinated by Helene Riffault, Director-General of Faits et Opinions, Paris. Her report is available from the European Community Information Service, 2100 M Street, N.W., Suite 707, Washington, D.C. 20037.
