

**To:** All Chapters, Campaigns and other stakeholders in energy policy  
**From:** Program Department Co-leads on Energy [Robin Mann and Jesse Simons]  
**Re:** Clarifying Sierra Club policy and protocols related to nuclear subsidies and bailouts

July 2017

**Overview:**

Nuclear energy is dirty energy. The Sierra Club does not support it and supports closure of existing nuclear power plants and fuel chain facilities as soon as possible. The good news is that clean energy and energy efficiency are not only much cheaper than nuclear but also increasingly are ready to scale up to replace nuclear without the need for natural gas. The nuclear industry understands that many of their plants are no longer economically competitive and are desperately trying to secure bailouts and subsidies and rebrand nuclear as a low carbon form of clean energy.

This memo is intended to help stakeholders - Chapter ExComs, Campaigns and others - respond effectively to this calculated attempt by the owners of America's aging and dangerous nuclear plants to stay afloat in a market environment that no longer has a place for inflexible and expensive so-called "baseload" plants.

**Guiding Policies:**

- ERP (Energy Resources Policy) "... [Nuclear power is not safe, affordable or clean ...
- [Nuclear plants] should be retired upon the expiration of their licensed operating period, and should be shut down immediately if significant safety, security or environmental threats are found. [p. 21]
- Nuclear Power: "... the Sierra Club supports the systematic reduction of society's dependence on nuclear fission as a source of electric power and recommends a phased closure and decommissioning of operating commercial nuclear fission electric power reactors."
- High-level Radioactive Waste: "... The obvious difficulty of assuring the permanent isolation of HLRW from the environment confirms the Sierra Club in its belief that the generation of further HLRW should be curtailed."

In very rare situations the Sierra Club may enter into a legal settlement or piece of legislation that includes support for energy sources we oppose. The guiding language for these very limited circumstances can be found in the ERP and it reads:

- "Sierra Club entities may support public policy proposals that include these resources [resources opposed by the Sierra Club - see ERP page 19 - 22] only if they find that the overall balance of the proposal strongly favors efficiency, renewable energy and greenhouse gas reductions, and that the environmental impacts are insubstantial."

This language is important because increasingly we are being forced to balance between the urgency of closing existing, risky nuclear facilities with the risks posed to communities and the environment where increased coal and gas will be used to replace the lost generating capacity. To help with situations like this we have developed the following protocol in partnership with the Beyond Coal Campaign and the Nuclear Free Team.

**Process and Protocol:**

1. The default position is that the Sierra Club will not support any new life extensions or subsidies for continued operation of existing and aging nuclear power plants.
2. If a Sierra Club entity (Chapter, Campaign or other) believes that there is compelling case to be made that a legislative deal (or other deal) involving extending or subsidizing nuclear plants "strongly favors efficiency, renewable energy and greenhouse gases" and "environmental impacts

are insubstantial" (as per policy), then the entity may recommend a position of non-opposition or support for the legislation, to be approved by the Board of Directors or their designees. Except in those instances where the Board determines it will be the final decision-maker, the Program Department Co-leads (Robin Mann and Jesse Simons) will have delegated responsibility to make the final decision,

3. The Sierra Club entity asking for an exemption must provide early notice of the pending decision, via written memo to the Program Department Co-leads that addresses the life-cycle environmental, health, economic and safety impacts and other considerations (including but not limited to fuel mining, processing), routine radioactive emissions, high and "low-level" radioactive waste generation, short and long term nuclear waste storage and transport risks, catastrophic risks, and environmental justice issues), and explains the political landscape, and the options advocates are weighing. The memo would be shared with both the Beyond Coal Campaign Leadership Team and the Nuclear Free Team. Both entities would then provide their recommended position for the organization to the Program Department Co-Leads.
4. The Program Department Co-leads would serve as an early review team, and inform the Board of the pending decision.
5. In the rare cases where an exception is made to our default position of opposing life extensions and/or subsidies to allow for the continued operation of existing nuclear power plants it is essential that we communicate early and often that the Sierra Club is opposed to nuclear power, its goal is to see existing and aging reactors retired as quickly as possible, and that we did everything in our power to avert the need to make such a deal in the first place and to negotiate that out of whatever compromise is being supported.

**Conclusion:**

Thank you for reviewing this. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to Jesse Simons, Robin Mann, Bruce Nilles, Verena Owen or Susan Corbett. Contacts listed below.

And if you see any potential issues like this moving forward in your state, please alert the above contacts immediately.

Thank you.

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