

## The Nuclear Energy Institute: Green Washing Nuclear Power

### INVESTIGATIONS BRIEF

Public Relations dilemmas are nothing new for the nuclear industry. For more than half a century, this industry has attempted to deflect attention away from the dirty and dangerous downsides of nuclear power technology. Over the years, the nuclear industry's propagandists have merged and morphed and change their names, searching for something to hide the awful truth: the *Atomic Industrial Forum*, *Committee for Energy Awareness*, *The U.S. Council for Energy Awareness*, the *Nuclear Energy Institute* and the latest front group, *CASEnergy- Clean And Safe Energy*. Each manifestation of the industry front group has engaged in efforts to greenwash the truth about nuclear power.

Our investigation of nuclear greenwash will take several chapters. In this first essay, we will look at the history of this industry's tortured attempts to frame a highly dangerous technology as safe, friendly and environmentally beneficial. Starting with the *Atoms for Peace* program and the famous first *big lie* of energy "too cheap to meter", the nuclear industry has flailed time and again as it tries to gain acceptance and work its way past the massive cost overruns, design errors and tragic accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, amongst others.

### THE CAMPAIGN

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, an industry fraught with a legacy of problems, with no hope of revival, desperate for a lifeboat, clung to the looming threat of global warming and sought to position itself as the magic bullet. They asked that we *increase* our dependence on nuclear power, ignore all the problems, the accidents, terror threats, proliferation and undelivered radioactive waste solutions, and continue to ask taxpayers to insure nuclear power against inevitable liability.

### Background

#### 1953- Atomic Industrial Forum

The Atomic Industrial Forum (AIF) was founded in 1953 and marked the beginnings of the commercial nuclear industry in the United States.

In December of that year President Eisenhower introduced the "Atoms for Peace" program in a speech at the United Nations and in 1954 Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act which allowed corporations access to the materials and information acquired from the Manhattan Project's pursuit of the Atomic bomb. According to a nuclear industry's own documents, "AIF provided a forum to facilitate the government's transfer of nuclear technology to private industry."<sup>1</sup>

As with its offspring, part of AIF's mission was to manage the nuclear industry's image. After the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine, AIF's President Karl Walske attempted to defend the industry by challenging NRC Commissioner Asselstine's testimony

before Congress. Walske claimed that the NRC Commissioner's testimony on the dangers of nuclear power may have been misinterpreted in the public arena. Then [NRC Commissioner's response](#) [need link] to AIF can be read here.

#### 1979 - 1983 The Committees for Energy Awareness

The *Committee for Energy Awareness* (CEA) was formed in 1979 as an adjunct to *the Atomic Industrial Forum*. CEA's role was to repair the tarnished image of the nuclear industry after *Three Mile Island* (TMI). When the industry realized that this effort wasn't enough to repair the PR damage caused by the meltdown and evacuation around TMI they split CEA and AIF and created the "independent" group, *U.S. Committee for Energy Awareness* in 1983. This new committee was funded by the private utilities.

According to Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post*, the *US Committee for Energy Awareness* launched a \$30- million advertising and lobbying campaign in 1983.

"What its slick, low-key television ads failed to mention is that the group gets more than half its funding from 50 utilities, some of which have billed their unsuspecting customers for the media blitz.

"These ads just wouldn't have the same reassuring tone if the tag line had been: 'Brought to you by America's nuclear utilities, makers of Three Mile Island. Energy for a Brighter Tomorrow.'"<sup>2</sup>

Kurtz and the *Post* had access to the Committee's internal documents that detailed its green washing campaign. As noted in the *Post*:

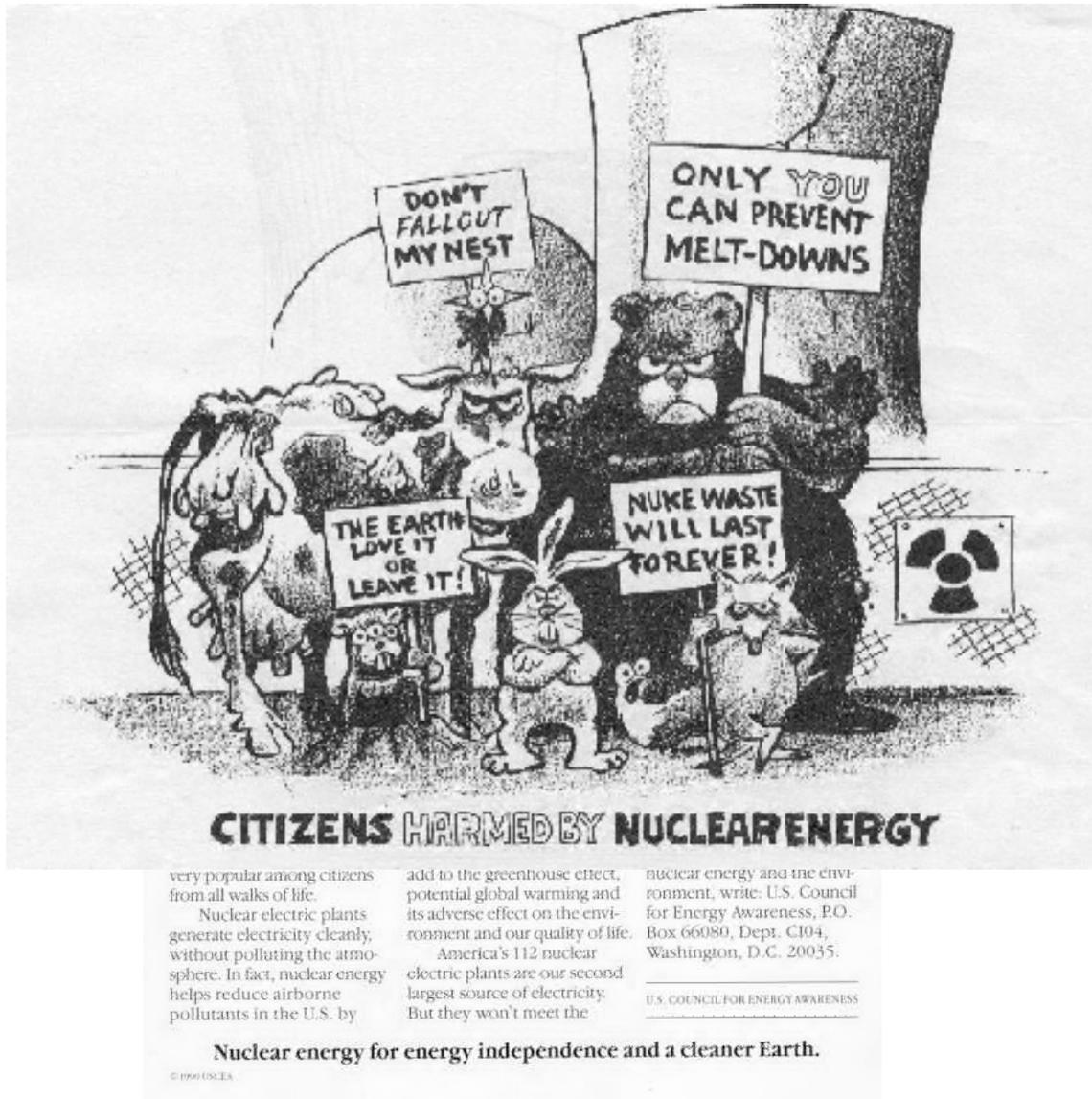
"...training and placement of independent energy experts on local radio and television talk shows in priority regions ... letters to the editor by energy experts ... (and) op-ed columns and other bylined articles by nuclear supporters outside the industry." All of this was designed to 'establish the credibility of CEA as more than a propaganda organization.'"

#### 1987 - US Council for Energy Awareness

In a subtle re-branding exercise, the *U.S. Council for Energy Awareness* (USCEA) was formed in 1987 after the nuclear industry recommended that the existing Washington nuclear associations reorganize. Shuffling staff around, most of the AIF staff to joined with *the US Committee for Energy Awareness*, while a third of AIF joined a new regulatory organization, *The Nuclear Management and Resources Council*.<sup>3</sup>

This revised version of USCEA continued the advertising campaigns of its predecessors. In 1988, the Council undertook some awkward attempts at greenwashing. One print ad ran with the tag line “Nuclear energy for energy independence and a cleaner Earth” and featured picketing animals. The television and print ad campaign attempted to label nuclear power as “clean” and claimed that “nuclear power didn’t contribute to the greenhouse effect, possible global warming and its adverse effect on the environment and our quality of life.”

Too much to pass up, Greenpeace countered these early greenwash advertisements with our own parodies of the USCEA ads that were strategically placed in television programs. You might catch one of these mock ads on reruns of Law & Order.



1994 - Nuclear Energy Institute

The *Nuclear Energy Institute* (NEI) is the latest manifestation of the propaganda wing of the nuclear industry. NEI was formed by the merger of the *US Council for Energy Awareness*, the

**GREENPEACE**

*Nuclear Management and Resources Council, the American Nuclear Energy Council, and the Nuclear Division of the Edison Electric Institute in 1994.* <sup>4</sup>

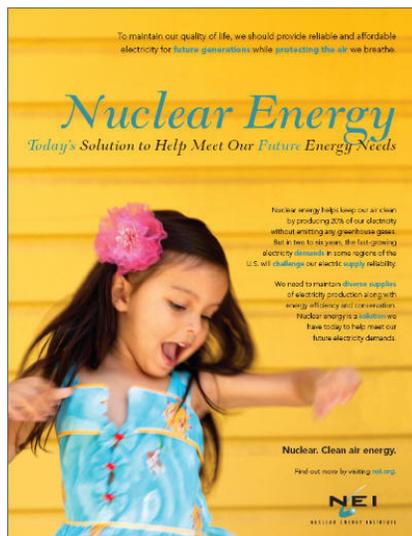
NEI has continued the media barrage of its predecessors prompting environmentalist to challenge the ads before the *Better Business Bureau (BBB)*.

In December 1998, the BBB found that NEI ads falsely claimed that nuclear reactors make power without polluting the air and water or damaging the environment. According to the New York Times, The BBB said that, "The nuclear industry should stop calling itself 'environmentally clean' and should stop saying it makes power 'without polluting the environment.'" Andrea Levine, the director of the division, said such claims were "unsupportable."<sup>5</sup>

Since then NEI has virtually ignored the BBB and has continued to run advertisements touting the supposed environmental benefits of their technology. This brazen disregard for the BBB prompted the environmental groups to bring NEI before the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). And in December 1999, the FTC found that "because the discharge of hot water from cooling systems is known to harm the environment, and given the unresolved issues surrounding disposal of radioactive waste, we think that NEI has failed to substantiate its general environmental benefit claim."<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately the FTC failed to rule on whether the NEI ads were commercial or political speech and thus failed to exercise jurisdiction over the case.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the FTC punting on the issue, NEI ads and claims have changed precious little. NEI continues to make the same claims that the BBB found to be false and misleading. In a new twist to tried and true propaganda ploys that the industry has used for decades, NEI has recently employed the use of new front groups to push the its message.

[Ad youtube and print ad.]



<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4280491657378693263&q=nuclear+energy+institute%2C+advertisement>

**GREENPEACE**



## 2006 – Clean and Safe Energy CASEnergy

In 2006, NEI hired a former Greenpeace activist turned industry apologist, Patrick Moore and former New Jersey Governor and US EPA chief Christie Todd Whitman as the lead public faces of the new CASEnergy Coalition.

Given the nuclear industry's track record, you can understand why these corporations would need the services of major PR firms and form front groups whose primary purpose is to inveigle and obfuscate. CASEnergy had a big roll out at the National Press Club in Washington, DC and a placed op-ed piece in the Washington Post entitled "Going Nuclear."<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, the major media outlets bought the industry line hook, line & sinker as they pitched nuclear power as a global warming panacea and substitute for dirty coal power plants. It was left to the Columbia Journalism Review to call the media on their failure to accurately identify CASEnergy as a front group for NEI.<sup>9</sup>

In our next chapter, StopGreenwash will take a detailed look at the tactics employed by the nuclear propaganda machines and to mislead the public.

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Council For Energy Awareness, Report to Members, 1992 –1993. P. 3

<sup>2</sup> Hiding a Lobby Behind a Name: Why Not Truth in Labeling For Interest Groups? HOWARD KURTZ / Washington Post 27jan85

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Council For Energy Awareness, Report to Members, 1992 –1993. P. 3

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nei.org/aboutnei/history/>

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Wald, Better Business Bureau Says Nuclear Group Ran False Ads, New York Times, December 10, 1998.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9901E3DA133AF933A25751C1A96E958260&sec=&sp on=&pagewanted=all> )

<sup>6</sup> Federal Trade Commission, Letter to Joseph Colvin, President and CEO, Nuclear Energy Institute, December 15, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/04/14/AR2006041401209.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/04/14/AR2006041401209.html)

<sup>9</sup> "FALSE FRONTS: Why to Look Behind the Label". Columbia Journalism Review, July/August 2006.