

Is Greener Always Better?

Environmentalists have been insisting the world embrace sustainable energy for years. Although few argue against this idea, there are some issues with going green that are often ignored and may warrant a halt on current initiatives.

Although no pollutants are emitted when sunlight is converted into electricity, solar power isn't as clean as one might think. If the manufacturing of the devices needed to harness this power is considered, the impact solar energy has on the environment can be quite devastating. Each year, producers of solar panels generate millions of pounds of hazardous waste, and how it is disposed of is a huge problem. In China, villagers recently protested a factory owned by Jinko Solar after the company's poisonous chemicals contaminated a nearby river. Officials analyzed the water and found that it contained toxic levels of fluoride. Jinko was fined and told to clean up its act, but future reviews will be needed to ensure the company complies.

Chemicals aren't the only things that cause damage to the environment. Hydroelectricity is the world's most widely used form of renewable energy, and it is also responsible for the destruction of countless ecosystems. The dams that are constructed to house these power stations disrupt the natural flow of the water they are built on. This leads to the submersion of once useable land and divides the habitat along the riverside, causing wildlife to be separated from their sources of food. Accidents are another issue for areas that surround these structures. In 2009, an explosion at the Sayano—Shushenskaya hydroelectric power station caused over 40 tons of transformer oil to be released into the Yenisei River, which killed more than 400 tons of trout.

No energy source has been the subject of more debate than nuclear power, though. When it came into use in the 1950s, the public hailed it as a marvel of modern technology. It was praised because unlike fossil fuels, it would never run out and it released no pollution into the air. But that wasn't the whole story. It soon became apparent that accidents at nuclear power plants could render any benefit worthless. One of the worst of these was the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which resulted in lots of radioactive material being released into the environment. People living within a 30-kilometer radius of the plant had to be evacuated, and that zone remains empty today. The Fukushima meltdown in 2011 renewed many people's dislike of nuclear power, and several countries are doing something about it. Germany has vowed to close its nuclear power plants by 2022, and Italy has outlawed them altogether.

Finding better energy sources is certainly vital for the future. However, attention

must be paid to all phases of the collection process. So long as there is the possibility of such negative consequences from gathering this energy, the benefits aren't nearly as great as they could be.

1. What is the major concern with solar power?
 - a. The panels can only process power in warm temperatures.
 - b. The sun cannot be relied on for continuous light.
 - c. It takes too much time to collect enough power.
 - d. The manufacturing of solar panels produces lots of waste.

2. How was Jinko Solar punished by the government?
 - a. The government banned the selling of its items.
 - b. Those in high positions had to resign.
 - c. The company had to pay a penalty.
 - d. It had to close its factory immediately.

3. What happened as a result of Sayano–Shushenskaya dam explosion?
 - a. A great number of fish were killed.
 - b. The river flooded, destroying the neighboring ecosystem.
 - c. Fluoride was spilled into the river.
 - d. Those living close to the structure had to move.

4. Why are people wary of nuclear power?
 - a. It seems too expensive to be worthwhile.
 - b. Accidents happen more frequently at their plants.
 - c. Nuclear power plants take up too much space.
 - d. Problems at plants can be devastating.