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Letters

Why no nukes?

I was surprised and disappointed that the "EPA's list of most effective specific policies" did not include more use of nuclear power, particularly in light of the agency's conclusion that "practices that reduce coal burning would make the biggest cuts in the growth of greenhouse gases" ("EPA offers options to slow global warming," SN: 3/25/89, p.183).

Burning "gasified trees" and "developing low-cost solar energy" are more political than practical and would take many years to realize. This is inconsistent with the urgent need for action emphasized in the article. Nuclear power is clean, and it is here and now. So why was it not mentioned?

Robert W. Strong
San Jose, Calif.

The EPA study examined a range of options to slow global warming, among them greater reliance on nuclear power. The policy model shows that promoting nuclear power would reduce Earth's future warming by about 6

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280 The Strange Case of the Tasaday

Cover: Today, modern clothes and radios characterize the Tasaday tribe in the Philippines. Some scientists say the Tasaday were isolated hunter-gatherers until as recently as 1972, while others claim they were a hoax inspired by the Marcos government. Scientific data on the group are now under intense scrutiny. (Photo: John Nance)



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percent as of the year 2100, compared with a world that adopted no policies to stem warming. Yet the model suggests that greater reductions in long-term warming might come from developing biomass fuels and low-cost solar energy technology, which is why I emphasized their roles in writing the story.

The report mentioned that development of new nuclear power plants has waned because of high costs and safety concerns. Nuclear power could assume a greater role in the future if advanced types of reactors restore public confidence, says the report. — R. Monastersky

Explaining a rise in lung cancer

"Lung cancer death rates among females nearly doubled [from 1970 to 1986] due to the increasing number of female smokers," says the Public Health Service ("U.S. health: The good and the bad," SN: 3/25/89, p.188).

Since the group doing the increased smoking is mainly teenagers, while the group dying of cancer is mainly oldsters, it hardly follows that the one statistic explains the other.

Offhand, I can think of three equally valid

explanations for the rising appearance of "lung cancer" on death certificates: the social acceptance of cancer as a cause of death; the spread of X-ray and laboratory facilities to validate cancer diagnoses; and the bulge in the over-50 population, where asthenic diseases, such as cancer, predominate.

Scott Nicholson
Bradenton, Fla.

It is true that older women are dying of cancer — public health officials say people rarely get lung cancer before age 45. The increase in U.S. lung cancer mortality among older women today is due to higher proportions of smokers among that group compared with previous generations, according to the Public Health Service report. But warnings about the dangers of cigarette smoking seem to be working: The number of teenage female smokers dropped from 22 percent in 1977 to 15 percent in 1985, according to the report. That good news won't start showing up in the nation's health statistics for about 30 years. — K.A. Fackelmann

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