

# Evaluation of Nuclear Power as a Proposed Solution to Global Warming, Air Pollution, and Energy Security

In  
*100% Clean, Renewable Energy and Storage for Everything*  
Textbook in Preparation

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## Summary

In evaluating solutions to global warming, air pollution, and energy security, two important questions arise are (1) should new nuclear plants be built to help solve these problems, and (2) should existing, aged nuclear plants be kept open as long as possible to help solve these problems? To answer these questions, the main risks associated with nuclear power are examined.

The risks associated with nuclear power can be broken down into two categories: (1) risks affecting its ability to reduce global warming and air pollution and (2) risks affecting its ability to provide energy and environmental (aside from climate and air pollution) security. Risks in the former category include delays between planning and operation, emissions contributing to global warming and outdoor air pollution, and costs. Risks in the latter category include weapons proliferation risk, reactor meltdown risk, radioactive waste risk, and mining cancer and land despoilment risks. These risks are discussed, in this section. Here are additional specific findings:

- New nuclear power plants cost 2.3 to 7.4 times those of onshore wind or utility solar PV per kWh, take 5 to 17 years longer between planning and operation, and produce 9 to 37 times the emissions per kWh as wind.
- As such, a fixed amount of money spent on a new nuclear plant means much less power generation, a much longer wait for power, and a much greater emission rate than the same money spent on WWS technologies.
- There is no such thing as a zero- or close-to-zero emission nuclear power plant. Even existing plants emit due to the continuous mining and refining of uranium needed for the plant. However, all plants also emit 4.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the water vapor and heat they release. This contrasts with solar panels and wind turbines, which reduce heat or water vapor fluxes to the air by about 2.2 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh for a net difference from this factor alone of 6.6 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh.
- On top of that, because all nuclear reactors take 10-19 years or more between planning and operation vs. 2-5 year for a utility solar or wind plant, nuclear emits 64-102 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh more over 100 years just due emissions from the background grid waiting for it to come online or be refurbished vs. a wind or solar farm.
- Overall, emissions from new nuclear are 78 to 178 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, not close to 0.
- China's investment in nuclear plants that take so long between planning and operation instead of wind resulted in China's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increasing 1.3 percent from 2016 to 2017 rather than declining up to 3.4 percent.

**Table 3.5.** Total 100-year CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from several different energy technologies. The total includes lifecycle emissions, opportunity cost emissions, anthropogenic heat and water vapor emissions, weapons and leakage risk emissions, and emissions from loss of carbon storage in land and vegetation. All units are g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh-electricity, except the last, column, which gives the ratio of total emissions of a technology to the emissions from onshore wind. CCS/U is carbon capture and storage or use.

Technology	<sup>a</sup> Lifecycle Emissions	<sup>b</sup> Opportunity Cost Emissions Due to Delays	<sup>c</sup> Anthropogenic heat emissions	<sup>d</sup> Anthropogenic water vapor emissions	<sup>e</sup> Nuclear Weapons risk or 100-Year CCS/U Leakage Risk	<sup>f</sup> Loss of CO <sub>2</sub> Due to Covering Land or Clearing Vegetation	<sup>g</sup> Total 100-Year CO <sub>2</sub> e	<sup>h</sup> Ratio of 100-Year CO <sub>2</sub> e to That of Wind-Onshore
Solar PV-rooftop	15-34	-12 to -16	-2.2	0	0	0	0.8-15.8	0.1-3.3
Solar PV-utility	10-29	0	-2.2	0	0	0.054-0.11	7.85-26.9	0.91-5.6
CSP	8.5-24.3	0	-2.2	0-2.8	0	0.13-0.34	6.43-25.2	0.75-5.3
Wind-onshore	7.0-10.8	0	-1.7 to -0.7	-0.5 to -1.5	0	0.0002-0.0004	4.8-8.6	1
Wind-offshore	9-17	0	-1.7 to -0.7	-0.5 to -1.5	0	0	6.8-14.8	0.79-3.1
Geothermal	15.1-55	14-21	0	0-2.8	0	0.088-0.093	29-79	3.4-16
Hydroelectric	17-22	41-61	0	2.7-26	0	0	61-109	7.1-23
Wave	21.7	4-16	0	0	0	0	26-38	3.0-7.9
Tidal	10-20	4-16	0	0	0	0	14-36	1.6-7.5
Nuclear	9-70	64-102	1.6	2.8	0-1.4	0.17-0.28	78-178	9.0-37
Biomass	43-1,730	36-51	3.4	3.2	0	0.09-0.5	86-1,788	10-373
Natural gas-CCS/U	179-265	46-62	0.61	3.7	0.36-8.6	0.41-0.69	230-341	27-71
Coal-CCS/U	230-442	46-62	1.5	3.6	0.36-8.6	0.41-0.69	282-518	33-108

<sup>a</sup>Lifecycle emissions are 100-year carbon equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions that result from the construction, operation, and decommissioning of a plant. They are determined as follows:

Solar PV-rooftop: The range is assumed to be the same as the solar PV-utility range, but with 5 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh added to both the low and high ends to account for the use of fixed tilt for all rooftop PV versus the use of some tracking for utility PV.

Solar PV-utility: The range is derived from Fthenakis and Raugei (2017). It is inclusive of the 17 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh mean for CdTe panels at 11% efficiency, the 27 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh mean for multi-crystalline silicon panels at 13.2% efficiency, and the 29 gCO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh mean for mono-crystalline silicon panels at 14% efficiency. The upper limit of the range is held at the mean for multi-crystalline silicon since panel efficiencies are now much higher than 13.2%. The lower limit is calculated by scaling the CdTe mean to 18.5% efficiency, its maximum in 2018.

CSP: The lower limit CSP lifecycle emission rate is from Jacobson (2009). The upper limit is from Ko et al. (2018).

Wind-onshore and wind-offshore: The range is derived from Kaldelis and Apostolou (2017).

Geothermal: The range is from Jacobson (2009) and consistent with the review of Tomasini-Montenegro et al. (2017).

Hydroelectric and wave: From Jacobson (2009).

Tidal: From Douglass et al. (2008).

Nuclear: The range of 9-70 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh is from Jacobson (2009), which is within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s range of 4-110 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh (Bruckner et al., 2014), and conservative relative to the 68 (10-130) g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the review of Lenzen (2008) and the 66 (1.4-288) g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the review of Sovacool (2008).

Biomass: The range provided is for biomass electricity generated by forestry residues (43 gCO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh), industry residues (46), energy crops (208), agriculture residues (291), and contaminated waste (biodegradable waste, demolition wood, municipal waste, sewage sludge, sewage gas, and landfill gas) (1730) (Kadiyala et al., 2016).

Natural gas-CCS/U: The range provided bounds the range of emissions from a CCGT with carbon capture and a natural gas peaking plant with carbon capture from Skone (2015), where the latter assumes the same ratio with-to-without carbon capture as with the CCGT (Table 3.4).

Coal-CCS/U: The lower bound is for IGCC with carbon capture from Skone (2015). The upper bound is from Jacobson (2009).

<sup>b</sup>Opportunity cost emissions are emissions per kWh over 100 years from the background electric power grid, calculated from Equations 3.1 and 3.2 due to (a) the longer time lag between planning and operation of one energy technology relative to another and (b) additional downtime to refurbish a technology at the end of its useful life compared with the other technology. The planning-to-operation times of the technologies in this table are 0.5-2 years for solar PV-

rooftop; 2-5 years for solar PV-utility, CSP, wind-onshore, wind-offshore, tidal, and wave; 3-6 years for geothermal; 8-16 years for hydroelectric; 10-19 years for nuclear; 4-9 years for biomass (without CCS/U), and 6-11 years for natural gas-CCS/U and coal-CCS/U (Jacobson, 2009, except rooftop PV and natural gas-CCS/U values are added and solar PV-rooftop is updated here). The refurbishment times are 0.05-1 year for solar PV-rooftop; 0.25-1 year for solar-PV-utility, CSP, wind-onshore, wind-offshore, wave, and tidal; 1-2 years for geothermal and hydroelectric; 2-4 years for nuclear, and 2-3 years for biomass, coal-CCS/U, and natural gas-CCS/U. The lifetimes before refurbishment are 15 years for tidal and wave; 30 years for solar PV-rooftop, solar PV-utility, CSP, wind-onshore, wind-offshore; 30-35 years for biomass, coal-CCS/U, and natural gas-CCS/U; 30-40 years for geothermal; 40 years for nuclear; and 80 years for hydroelectric (Jacobson, 2009). The opportunity cost emissions are calculated here relative to the utility-scale technologies with the shortest time between planning and operation (solar-PV-utility, CSP, wind-onshore, and wind-offshore). The opportunity cost emissions of the latter technologies are, by definition, zero. The opportunity cost emissions of all other technologies are calculated as in Example 3.1 assuming a background U.S. grid emission intensity equal to 557.3 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh in 2017. This is derived from an electricity mix from EIA (2018d) and emissions, weighted by their 100-year GWPs, of CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, and N<sub>2</sub>O from mining, transporting, processing and using fossil fuels, biomass, or uranium. The reason tidal power has opportunity cost emissions although its planning-to-operation time is the same as onshore wind is due to tidal's shorter lifetime. Thus, it has more down time over 100 years than do other technologies. See Section 3.2.2.1.

<sup>c</sup>Anthropogenic heat emissions here include the heat released to the air from combustion (for coal or natural gas) or nuclear reaction, converted to CO<sub>2</sub>e (see Section 3.2.2.2). For solar PV and CSP, heat emissions are negative because these three technologies reduce sunlight to the surface by converting it to electricity. The lower flux to the surface cools the ground or a building below the PV panels. For wind turbines, heat emissions are also negative because turbines extract energy from wind to convert it to electricity (Section 3.2.2.3 and Example 3.6). The electricity from all electric power generation also dissipates to heat, but this is due to the consumption rather than production of power and is the same amount per kWh for all technologies so is not included in this table.

<sup>d</sup>Anthropogenic water vapor emissions here include the water vapor released to the air from combustion (for coal and natural gas) or from evaporation (water-cooled CSP, water-cooled geothermal, hydroelectric, nuclear natural gas, and coal), converted to CO<sub>2</sub>e (see Section 3.2.2.3). Air-cooled CSP and geothermal plants have zero water vapor flux, representing the low end of these technologies. The high end is assumed to be the same as for nuclear, which also uses water for cooling. The low end for hydropower assumes 1.75 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh evaporated from reservoirs at mid to high latitudes (Flury and Frischknecht, 2012). The upper end is 4.5 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh from Jacobson (2009) for lower latitude reservoirs and assumes reservoirs serve multiple purposes. For biomass, the number is based only on the water emitted from the plant due to evaporation or combustion, not water to irrigate some energy crops. Thus, the upper estimate is low. The negative water vapor flux for onshore and offshore wind is due to the reduced water evaporation caused by wind turbines (Section 3.2.2.3 and Example 3.6).

<sup>e</sup>Nuclear weapons risk is the risk of emissions due to nuclear weapons use resulting from weapons proliferation caused by the spread of nuclear energy. The risk ranges from zero (no use of weapons over 100 years) to 1.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh (one nuclear exchange in 100 years) (Section 3.3.2.1). The 100-year CCS/U leakage risk is the estimated rate, averaged over 100 years, that CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered underground leaks back to the atmosphere. Section 3.2.2.4 contains a derivation. The leakage rate from natural gas-CCS/U is assumed to be the same as for coal-CCS/U.

<sup>f</sup>Loss of carbon due to covering land or clearing vegetation is the loss of carbon sequestered in soil or in vegetation due to the covering or clearing of land by an energy facility; by a mine where the fuel is extracted from (in the case of fossil fuels and uranium); by roads, railways, or pipelines needed to transport the fuel; and by waste disposal sites. No loss of carbon occurs for solar PV-rooftop, wind-offshore, wave, or tidal power. In all remaining cases, except for solar PV-utility and CSP, the energy facility is assumed to replace grassland with the organic carbon content and grass content as described in the text. For solar PV-utility and CSP, it is assumed that the organic content of both the vegetation and soil are 7% that of grassland because (a) most all CSP and many PV arrays are located in deserts with low carbon storage and (a) most utility PV panels and CSP mirrors are elevated above the ground. For biomass, the low value assumes the source of biomass is industry residues or contaminated wastes. The high value assumes energy crops, agricultural residues, or forestry residues. See Section 3.2.2.5.

<sup>g</sup>The total column is the sum of the previous four columns.

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### 3.3. Why Nuclear Power Represents an Opportunity Cost

In evaluating solutions to global warming, air pollution, and energy security, two important questions arise are (1) should new nuclear plants be built to help solve these problems, and (2) should existing, aged

nuclear plants be kept open as long as possible to help solve these problems? To answer these questions, the main risks associated with nuclear power are first examined.

The risks associated with nuclear power can be broken down into two categories: (1) risks affecting its ability to reduce global warming and air pollution and (2) risks affecting its ability to provide energy and environmental (aside from climate and air pollution) security. Risks in the former category include delays between planning and operation, emissions contributing to global warming and outdoor air pollution, and costs. Risks in the latter category include weapons proliferation risk, reactor meltdown risk, radioactive waste risk, and mining cancer and land despoilment risks. These risks are discussed, in this section.

**Nuclear fission** is the process by which tiny, slow-moving neutrons bombard and split certain fissile heavy elements, such as **uranium-235** ( $^{235}\text{U}$ ) or **plutonium-239** ( $^{239}\text{Pu}$ ) in a **nuclear reactor**. The 238 and 239 refer to the isotope, or number of protons plus neutrons in the nucleus of a uranium or plutonium atom, respectively. A **fissile** element is one that can be split during fission by slow-moving neutrons and whose neutrons from splitting can split other fissile atoms in a chain reaction.  $^{235}\text{U}$  is the only fissile element found in nature.  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  is a product of **uranium-238** ( $^{238}\text{U}$ ) capturing a free neutron in a nuclear reactor. The resulting  $^{239}\text{U}$  decays to  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ , a fissile element.

When a neutron hits  $^{235}\text{U}$  in a nuclear reactor, the neutron is absorbed, forming  $^{236}\text{U}$ , which splits into Krypton-92 ( $^{92}\text{Kr}$ ), Barium-141 ( $^{141}\text{Ba}$ ), three free neutrons, and gamma rays. The new neutrons can then collide with other  $^{235}\text{U}$  or  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  atoms, splitting them in a chain reaction. When the fragments and the gamma rays collide with water, the collision converts kinetic energy and electromagnetic energy, respectively, to massive amounts of heat.

In a **boiling water reactor (BWR) nuclear power plant**, the heat boils water directly. The high-pressure steam turns a turbine connected to a generator to produce electricity.

In a **pressurized water reactor (PWR)** plant, the air pressure in the reactor is increased substantially, up to 155 bar (air pressure at Earth's surface is 1 bar). Because the boiling point of water increases with increasing atmospheric pressure, water in the reactor doesn't boil, even though the temperature in the reactor reaches 282 °C (at Earth's surface, water usually boils at 100 °C). The water in the reactor, which is radioactive, passes through a pipe and exchanges its heat with a different batch of water maintained at normal air pressure, causing the latter water to boil. The boiling water creates steam to run a steam turbine. The water batches are kept separate to ensure radioactive material in the high-pressure reactor does not pass through to the water vapor running through the steam turbine. BWR and PWR reactors are both **light water reactors (LWRs)**, which are reactors that use normal water.

Uranium in a nuclear power plant is originally stored in small ceramic pellets within a metal fuel rod, often 3.7-m long. A conventional BWR or PWR nuclear reactor will go through one rod after about six years, and the rod and remaining material in it become radioactive waste. Reactors that use rods once are referred to as **once-through** reactors. The radioactive waste in the fuel rod must be stored for up to 200,000 years or more.

A fuel rod that has gone through a fission reactor once still has 99 percent of its uranium left over, including slightly more  $^{235}\text{U}$  than natural uranium. This remaining uranium and its fission product, plutonium, can be extracted and reprocessed for use in a **breeder reactor**, extending the life of a given mass of uranium and reducing waste significantly. However, the reprocessing increases the cost and the production of  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  by the collision of  $^{238}\text{U}$  with a fast moving neutron. Breeder reactors can thus be

optimized to produce  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  for use in nuclear weapons (Karam, 2006), so they are a concern with respect to weapons proliferation.

An alternative fuel to uranium in nuclear reactors is thorium. **Thorium**, like uranium, can be used to produce nuclear fuel in breeder reactors. The advantage of thorium is that it produces less long-lived radioactive waste than does uranium. Its products are also more difficult to convert into nuclear weapons material. However, thorium still produces  $^{232}\text{U}$ , which was used in one nuclear bomb core produced during the **Operation Teapot** bomb tests in 1955. Thus, thorium is not free of nuclear weapons proliferation risk.

A proposed alternative to the large once-through and breeder reactors that have been built to date is the **small modular reactor** (SMR). SMRs are nuclear fission reactors that are proposed to be much smaller than a traditional reactor and prefabricated in a factory. The purpose of prefabricating much of the reactor is to reduce construction time, costs, and mistakes during construction. The reactor would then be moved to its final site, where construction would be completed. Many types of SMRs have been proposed, including miniature versions of current reactors and new designs.

One type of new design is a **fast reactor**, in which the fuel is reformulated to allow fast-moving neutrons, rather than slow-moving neutrons, to split an atom. One way to do this is to increase  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ , which absorbs more fast-moving neutrons than does  $^{235}\text{U}$ . Fast reactors can be turned into breeder reactors by surrounding the core with  $^{238}\text{U}$ , which absorbs a fast-moving neutron to become  $^{239}\text{U}$ , which decays to  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ . Whereas, slow reactors still produce significant waste, fast reactors produce less but also increase the potential for nuclear weapons proliferation by producing more  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ . In addition, because SMRs are small and modular, many countries that don't currently have nuclear energy facilities can readily purchase them, increasing the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation. Non-breeder SMRs also suffer from the same waste issues as non-SMRs. All SMRs also have meltdown risks and require uranium, so have the same issues associated with uranium mining as non-SMRs. Finally, because no SMR has been mass produced to date, the emissions, time between planning and operation, and cost of an SMR are still not known.

Finally, **nuclear fusion** of light atomic nuclei (e.g., protium, deuterium, or tritium) could theoretically supply power indefinitely without long-lived radioactive waste because the products are isotopes of helium. However, little prospect exists for fusion to be commercially available for at least 50 to 100 years, if ever.

Nuclear power from fission first became a source of electric power in the 1950s. The first nuclear power plant to produce electricity was an experimental reactor in Arco, Idaho. On December 20, 1951, it powered four light bulbs. On June 26, 1954, a 5 MW nuclear reactor was connected to the electric power grid for industrial use in Obninsk, Russia. Subsequently, on August 27, 1956, a 50 MW reactor was connected to the grid for commercial use in Windscale, England.

As of 2019, over 400 active nuclear reactors provide electric power among 31 countries. Only two of these reactors are breeder reactors. For this number of reactors, uranium mines produce about 60,000 tonnes of uranium per year. Uranium reserves (aside from hard-to-extract uranium in seawater) as of 2015 were about 7.6 million tonnes. This suggests that about 127 years of uranium are available for current once-through fuel cycle reactors at near-current rates of uranium use. As such, even if the issues discussed below were not issues, uranium is a limited resource, and growing nuclear power will deplete uranium faster. Below, the additional risks associated with nuclear power are discussed.

### **3.3.1. Risks Affecting the Ability of Nuclear Power to Address Global Warming and Air Pollution**

The first category of risk associated with nuclear power includes risks affecting nuclear power's ability to reduce global warming and air pollution. These risks include the long lag time between planning and operating of and to refurbish a nuclear reactor, nuclear's high carbon equivalent emissions relative to WWS technologies, and nuclear's high costs.

#### 3.3.1.1. Delays Between Planning and Operation and Due to Refurbishing Reactors

As discussed in Section 3.2.2, the longer the time lag between the planning and operation of an energy facility, the more the air pollution and climate-relevant emissions from the background electric power grid. Similarly, the longer the time required to refurbish a plant for continued use at the end of its life, the greater the emissions from the background grid while the plant is down.

The time between planning and operation of a nuclear power plant includes the time to obtain a site, a construction permit, financing, and insurance; the time between construction permit approval and issue; and the construction time of the plant.

In March 2007, the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved the first request for a site permit in 30 years. This process took 3.5 years. The time to review and approve a construction permit is another 2 years and the time between the construction permit approval and issue is about 0.5 years. Thus, the minimum time for preconstruction approvals (and financing) in the United States is 6 years. An estimated maximum time is 10 years. The time to construct a nuclear reactor depends significantly on regulatory requirements and costs. Although recent nuclear reactor **construction times** worldwide are often shorter than the 9-year median construction times in the United States since 1970 (Kooimey and Hultman, 2007), they averaged 7.4 years worldwide in 2015 (Berthelemy and Rangel, 2015). As such, a reasonable estimated range for construction time is 4 to 9 years, bringing the overall time between planning and operation of a nuclear power plant worldwide to 10 to 19 years.

An examination of some recent nuclear plant developments confirms that this range is not only reasonable, but an underestimate in at least one case. The **Olkiluoto 3** reactor in Finland was proposed to the Finnish cabinet in December 2000 to be added to an existing nuclear power plant. Its latest estimated completion date is 2020, giving a **planning-to-operation (PTO)** time of 20 years. The **Hinkley Point** nuclear plant was planned starting in 2008 and, as of 2019, has an estimated completion year of 2025 to 2027, giving it a PTO time of 17 to 19 years. The **Vogtle 3 and 4** reactors in Georgia were first proposed in August 2006 to be added to an existing site. The anticipated completion dates are November 2021 and November 2022, respectively, given them PTO times of 15 and 16 years, respectively. Their construction times will be 8.5 and 9 years, respectively. The **Haiyang 1 and 2** reactors in China were planned starting in 2005. Construction started in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Haiyang 1 was commissioned October 22, 2018 and Haiyang 2 is expected in 2019, giving them construction times of 9 years and PTO times of 13 and 14 years, respectively. The **Taishan 1 and 2** reactors in China were bid in 2006. Construction began in 2008. Taishan 1 was connected to the grid in August 2018 and Taishan 2 is not expected to be connected until 2019, giving them construction times of 10 and 11 years and PTO times of 12 and 13 years, respectively. Planning and procurement for four reactors in **Ringhals**, Sweden started in 1965. One took 10 years, the second took 11 years, the third took 16 years, and the fourth took 18 years to complete. In sum, PTO times for both recent and historic nuclear plants have mostly been in the range of 10 to 19 years.

Planning-to-operation delays are not the only cause of background emissions associated with nuclear power or any other energy technology. Nuclear reactors have an expected lifetime on the order of 40 years. To run longer, they need to be refurbished. An estimate of the time to refurbish a nuclear reactor is 2-4 years. Refurbishment of the Darlington 2, Ontario nuclear reactor, for example, began in October 2016 and is scheduled to take 3 years and 4 months (World Nuclear News, 2018).



Equations 3.1 and 3.2 provide an estimate of the opportunity cost emissions resulting from the additional emissions from the background due to nuclear power's long PTO times and refurbishment time. Table 3.5 provides an overall estimate of this opportunity cost emissions as 64 to 102 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh, which is higher than its lifecycle emissions.

Example 3.10 illustrates how China's investing in nuclear plants that have taken so long between planning and operation instead of wind power resulted in China's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rising 1.3 percent from 2016 to 2017 rather than declining up to 3.4 percent. A similar result can be found if China invested in solar instead of nuclear.

**Example 3.10.** Did construction of nuclear plants in China cause its emissions to rise between 2016 and 2017?

Between 2016 and 2017, the CO<sub>2</sub> emission rate in China (including Hong Kong) increased by 121 million metric tonnes (MT), or 1.3 percent over 2016 (British Petroleum, 2018). During that period, China had 14 GW of nuclear power under construction, with planning for all the plants starting prior to 2012. The capital cost of a new nuclear power plant ranges from \$6500/MW to \$12,250/MW, whereas that of a new wind turbine ranges from \$1,150/MW to \$1,550/MW (Lazard, 2018). Assuming the capital for the nuclear plants had been invested in wind instead and the wind turbines had been installed prior to 2017 (because the planning to operation time of wind is 2 to 5 years versus 10 to 19 years for nuclear), estimate the 2017 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that would have been avoided. Assume the wind turbine capacity factor ranges from 0.3 to 0.37 and that the CO<sub>2</sub> emission intensity of the grid in China is between 850 and 900 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh (Li et al., 2017).

Solution:

Dividing the high capital cost of nuclear per MW by the low capital cost of wind per MW and vice versa and multiplying the result by 14 GW gives a range of 58.7 to 149 GW nameplate capacity of wind that could have been installed and running prior to 2017. Multiplying by the capacity factor range of wind and 8,760 hours per year and dividing by 1000 GW per TW gives the annual energy output of the wind that could have been installed as 154 to 483 TWh/yr. Multiplying this range by the CO<sub>2</sub> emission intensity that wind would have avoided, 850 to 900 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, and by 10<sup>9</sup> kWh/TWh, and dividing by 10<sup>12</sup> g/MT gives 131 to 435 MT-CO<sub>2</sub>/yr avoided. In other words, investing in wind instead of nuclear would have resulted in China decreasing its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by about 0.11 to 3.37 percent instead of increasing it by 1.3 percent. As such, investing in nuclear has caused an opportunity cost CO<sub>2</sub> emission in China.

### 3.3.1.2. Global Warming Relevant Emissions From Nuclear

Nuclear power contributes to global warming in the following ways: (1) Emissions from the background grid due to its long planning-to-operation times and refurbishment times (Section 3.2.2.1), (2) its lifecycle emissions (constructing, operating, and decommissioning the plant), (3) emissions from its heat and water vapor emissions (Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3), (4) emissions due to covering soil or clearing vegetation due to it (Section 3.2.2.5), and (5) the risk of emissions due to nuclear weapons proliferation (Section 3.3.2.1). Every one of these categories represents an actual emission or emission risk, yet most of these emissions, except for lifecycle emissions, are incorrectly ignored in virtually all lifecycle studies, thereby distorting the impacts on climate associated with some technologies over others.

Table 3.5 summarizes the CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from nuclear power from each of the five categories. The table indicates that the opportunity cost emissions of nuclear (64 to 102 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) are higher than the lifecycle emissions (9 to 70 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh). The range of lifecycle emissions estimated in Table 3.5 for nuclear power is well within the "range of harmonized lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions reported in the literature," 4 to 110 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh, from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change review (Bruckner et al., 2014, p. 540). It is also conservative relative to the 68 (10 to 130) g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the review of Lenzen (2008) and relative to the 66 (1.4 to 288) g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the review of Sovacool (2008).

Emissions from the heat and water vapor fluxes from nuclear (totaling 4.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>-kWh) alone suggest that during the life of an existing nuclear power plant, **nuclear can never be a zero-carbon-equivalent**

**technology**, even if its lifecycle emissions from mining and refining uranium were zero. On the other hand, the emissions from nuclear due to covering and clearing soil are relatively small (0.17 to 0.28 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh). Finally, Table 3.5 provides a low estimate (zero) and a high estimate (1.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) for the 100-year risk of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions associated with nuclear weapons proliferation due to nuclear energy. These numbers are derived in Section 3.3.2.1.

The total CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from nuclear power in Table 3.5 are 78 to 178 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh. These emissions are 7.2-25 times the emissions from onshore wind power. Although the emissions are lower than from coal and natural gas with carbon capture, nuclear power's high CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions coupled with its long planning-to-operation time render it an opportunity cost relative to the faster-to-operation and lower-emitting alternative WWS technologies.

### 3.3.1.3. Nuclear Costs

The third risk of nuclear power related to its ability to reduce global warming and air pollution is the high cost for a new nuclear reactor relative to most WWS technologies. In addition, the cost of running existing nuclear reactors has increased significantly, and the costs of new WWS technologies have dropped so much, that many existing reactors are shutting down early due to high costs. Others have requested large subsidies to stay open. In this section, nuclear costs are discussed briefly.

The levelized cost of energy (LCOE) for a new nuclear plant in 2018, based on calculations by Lazard (2018), is \$151 (112 to 189)/MWh. This compares with \$43 (29 to 56)/MWh for onshore wind and \$41 (36 to 46)/MWh for utility-scale solar PV from the same source (Table 7.9). A good portion of the high cost of nuclear is related to its long planning-to-operation time, which in turn is partly due to construction delays.

The spiraling cost of new nuclear plants in recent years has resulted in the cancelling of several nuclear reactors under construction (e.g., two reactors in South Carolina) and in requests for subsidies to keep construction projects alive (e.g., the two Vogtle reactors in Georgia). High costs have also reduced the number of new constructions to a crawl in liberalized markets of the world. However, in some countries, such as China, nuclear reactor growth continues due to large government subsidies, albeit with a 10- to 19-year time lag between planning and operation (Section 3.3.1.1) and escalating costs.

In their cost estimate, Lazard (2018) assumes a construction time for nuclear of 5.75 years (Table 7.9). The Vogtle 3 and 4 reactors, though will take at least 8.5 to 9 years to finish construction (Section 3.3.1.1). This additional delay results in an estimated LCOE for nuclear of about \$172 (128 to 215)/MWh.

As such, **a new nuclear power plant costs 2.3 to 7.4 times that of an onshore wind farm (or utility PV farm), take 5 to 17 years longer between planning and operation, and produces 9 to 37 times the emissions per unit electricity generated.** As such, a fixed amount of money spent on a new nuclear plant means much less power generation, a much longer wait for power, and much greater emission rate than the same money spent on WWS technologies.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change similarly concluded that the economic, social, and technical feasibility of nuclear power have not improved over time,

*“The political, economic, social and technical feasibility of solar energy, wind energy and electricity storage technologies has improved dramatically over the past few years, while that of nuclear energy and Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage (CCS) in the electricity sector has not shown similar improvements.” (de Coninck et al., 2018, page 4-5)*



Costs of operating existing nuclear plants have also escalated tremendously, forcing some plants either to shut down early or request large subsidies to stay open. Whether an existing nuclear plant should be subsidized to stay open should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The risk of shutting a functioning nuclear plant is that its energy may be replaced by higher-emitting fossil fuel generation. However, the risk of subsidizing the plant is that the funds could otherwise be used immediately to replace the nuclear plant with lower-cost and lower-emitting wind or solar electricity generation. Because the nuclear plant would usually need to be replaced within a decade in any case, simply incurring the cost of new renewables now will almost always be less expensive than spending the same money on renewables in ten years and paying nuclear a subsidy today.

For example, three existing upstate New York nuclear plants requested and received subsidies to stay open using the argument that the plants were needed to keep emissions low. However, Cebulla and Jacobson (2018) found that subsidizing such plants may increase carbon emissions and costs relative to replacing the plants with wind or solar. For different nuclear plants and subsidy levels, however, the results could change, which is why each plant needs to be evaluated individually.

### **3.3.2. Risks Affecting the Ability of Nuclear Power to Address Energy and Environmental Security**

The second category of risk related to nuclear power is its risk of not being able to provide energy and environmental (aside from climate and air pollution) security. One reason for this is risk of nuclear meltdown. Others are its risks related to weapons proliferation, waste disposal, and uranium mining (cancer and land degradation). WWS technologies do not have these risks.

#### **3.3.2.1. Weapons Proliferation Risk**

The first risk of nuclear power related to energy and environmental (aside from air pollution and climate) security is weapons proliferation risk. The growth of nuclear energy has historically increased the ability of nations to obtain or harvest plutonium or enrich uranium to manufacture nuclear weapons. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognizes this fact. They conclude, with “*robust evidence and high agreement*” that nuclear weapons proliferation concern is a barrier and risk to the increasing development of nuclear energy:

*“Barriers to and risks associated with an increasing use of nuclear energy include **operational risks** and the associated safety concerns, **uranium mining risks**, financial and regulatory risks, **unresolved waste management issues**, **nuclear weapons proliferation concerns**, and adverse public opinion).* (Bruckner et al., 2014, Executive Summary, p. 517).

The building of a nuclear reactor for energy in a country that does not currently have a reactor increases the risk of nuclear weapons development in that country. Specifically, it allows the country to import uranium for use in the nuclear energy facility. If the country so chooses, it can secretly enrich the uranium to create weapons grade uranium as well as harvest plutonium from uranium fuel rods used in a nuclear reactor, for nuclear weapons. This does not mean any or every country will do this, but historically some have and the risk is high, as noted by IPCC.

The next risk is whether a nuclear weapon developed in this manner is used. That risk also ranges from zero to some risk. If a weapon is used, it may kill 2 to 20 million people and burn down a megacity, releasing substantial emissions. As such, beyond the horrible risk of loss of human life, there is a risk of zero to some nonzero emission rate from nuclear weapons proliferation resulting from nuclear energy

proliferation. This risk is quantified later in this section. First, the difference between weapons grade and reactor grade uranium and plutonium is described.

Uranium ore is mined in an open pit or underground and contains 0.1 to 1 percent uranium by mass. The ore is milled to concentrate the uranium in the form of a yellow powder called **yellowcake**, which contains about 80 percent uranium oxide. Uranium is then processed further into uranium dioxide or uranium hexafluoride for use in nuclear reactors. However, before the uranium can be used in a reactor, it must first be enriched.

Of all uranium on Earth, 99.2745 percent is  $^{238}\text{U}$ , 0.72 percent is  $^{235}\text{U}$ , and 0.0055 percent is  $^{234}\text{U}$ . Thus, less than 1 percent is  $^{235}\text{U}$ .  $^{238}\text{U}$  has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. Most commercial light water nuclear reactors use uranium consisting of 3 to 5 percent  $^{235}\text{U}$ . As such, the concentration of  $^{235}\text{U}$  in the uranium fuel rod must be increased from its ore concentration. This is done by enrichment. **Uranium enrichment** is the process of separating the isotopes of uranium to increase the percent of  $^{235}\text{U}$  in a batch. Enriched uranium is useful for both nuclear energy and nuclear weapons.

Enrichment is done either by gas diffusion, centrifugal diffusion, or mass separation by magnetic field. Only gas diffusion and centrifugal diffusion are commercial processes, and most enrichment today is by **centrifugal diffusion** because it consumes only 2 to 2.5 percent the energy as gas diffusion. Nevertheless, centrifugal diffusion still requires many centrifuges and time, thus lots of energy. Centrifugal diffusion works by spinning a cylindrical container containing uranium. The heavier  $^{238}\text{U}$  atoms collect toward the outside edge of the cylinder and the lighter  $^{235}\text{U}$  atoms collect toward the inside.

Uranium with less than 20 percent  $^{235}\text{U}$  is called **low enriched uranium**. **Highly enriched uranium** contains 20 to 90 percent  $^{235}\text{U}$ . A nuclear weapon can be made with highly enriched uranium. However, weapons increase their destructiveness with more enrichment. Thus, ninety percent or more  $^{235}\text{U}$  is considered **weapons grade uranium** and is generally used with enriched plutonium in a nuclear bomb. An estimated 9,000 centrifuges can produce enough weapons grade  $^{235}\text{U}$  for one nuclear weapon from natural uranium in about seven months. With 5,000 centrifuges, the process takes about one year (IranWatch, 2015). Because uranium in a fuel rod used for nuclear energy has only 3 to 5 percent  $^{235}\text{U}$  and even less once it goes through a nuclear reactor, spent fuel rods are not considered a useful source of weapons grade uranium.

Plutonium is also used in nuclear weapons. 10 kg of  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  was used in the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. Plutonium can be obtained from a once-through nuclear reactor running on a reactor grade uranium fuel rod. When  $^{235}\text{U}$  decays and releases neutrons in a nuclear reactor, a neutron can bind with a  $^{238}\text{U}$  atom to produce  $^{239}\text{U}$ , which decays to produce  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ . Plutonium that is 93 percent or more  $^{239}\text{Pu}$  is considered weapons grade plutonium. Plutonium less than 80 percent plutonium is reactor grade. Because any plutonium can be used to make a bomb and is easier to obtain than enriching uranium (since plutonium can be harvested from a fuel rod running through a nuclear reactor), plutonium is considered the element of even greater concern than uranium with respect to nuclear weapons proliferation.

A large-scale worldwide increase in nuclear energy facilities would exacerbate the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation. In fact, producing material for a weapon requires merely operating a civilian nuclear power plant together with a sophisticated plutonium separation facility. The historic link between energy facilities and weapons is evidenced by the development or attempted development of weapons capabilities secretly under the guise of peaceful civilian nuclear energy or nuclear research programs in Pakistan, India, Iraq (prior to 1981), Iran, and, to some extent, North Korea.

If the world all-purpose energy were converted to electricity and electrolytic hydrogen by 2050, the ~12 trillion watts (TW) in resulting end-use electricity demand would require ~16,000 850-MW nuclear reactors (40 times the number today), or one installed every day for 44 years. Not only is this construction time impossible given the long PTO of nuclear, but also all known reserves of uranium worldwide for once-through reactors would run out in about three years. As such, there is no possibility the world will run solely on once-through nuclear energy by 2050.

Even if only 5 percent of the world's energy were supplied, the number of nuclear reactors worldwide would nearly double from the number of active reactors today to around 800. Many more countries would possess nuclear reactors, increasing the risk that these countries would use the facilities to hide the development of nuclear weapons, as has occurred historically.

If a country were to develop weapons as a result of their acquisition of one or more nuclear energy facilities, the risk that they would use the weapons is not zero, but it is between zero and non-zero. Here, the emissions associated with a limited nuclear exchange are quantified.

The explosion of fifty 15-kilotonne nuclear devices (a total of 1.5 megatonne, or 0.1 percent of the yield of a full-scale nuclear war) during a limited nuclear exchange in a megacity could burn 63 to 313 Tg of fuel, adding 1 to 5 Tg of warming and cooling aerosol particles to the atmosphere, much of it to the stratosphere, and killing 2.6 to 16.7 million people (Jacobson, 2009). The particle emissions would cause significant short- and medium-term regional temperature changes. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would cause long-term warming. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from such a conflict are estimated as 92 to 690 Tg-CO<sub>2</sub>.

The annual electricity production due to nuclear energy in 2017 was 2506 TWh/yr. If that doubled to 5,000 TWh/yr and if one nuclear exchange as described above resulted over 100 years, the net carbon emissions due to nuclear weapons proliferation caused by the expansion of nuclear energy worldwide would be 0.2 to 1.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, where the energy generation assumed is 5,000 TWh/yr multiplied by 100 years. This emission rate depends on the probability of a nuclear exchange over a given period and the strengths of nuclear devices used. The probability is bound between 0 and 1 exchange over 100 years to give the range of possible emissions for one such event as 0 to 1.4 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh, which is the emission rate used in Table 3.5.

#### [3.3.2.2. Meltdown Risk](#)

The second risk of nuclear power related to energy security is meltdown risk. As stated in Section 3.3.2.1, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change points to **operational risks** (meltdown) as a barrier and risk associated with nuclear power.

Through 2019, about 1.5 percent of all nuclear reactors operating in history have had a partial or significant core meltdown. To date, meltdowns at nuclear power plants have been either catastrophic (Chernobyl, Russia in 1986; three reactors at Fukushima Dai-ichi, Japan in 2011) or damaging (Three-Mile Island, Pennsylvania in 1979; Saint-Laurent France in 1980). The nuclear industry has proposed new reactor designs that they suggest are safer. However, these designs are generally untested, and there is no guarantee that the reactors will be designed, built and operated correctly or that a natural disaster or act of terrorism, such as an airplane flown into a reactor, will not cause them to fail, resulting in a major disaster.

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale, and the subsequent tsunami that knocked out backup power to a cooling system, caused six nuclear reactors at the **Fukushima 1 Dai-ichi plant** in northeastern Japan to shut down. Three reactors experienced a significant meltdown of nuclear fuel rods and multiple explosions of hydrogen gas that formed during efforts to cool the rods with seawater.

Uranium fuel rods in a fourth reactor also lost their cooling. As a result cesium-137, iodine-131, and other radioactive particles and gases were released into the air. Locally, tens of thousands of people were exposed to the radiation, and 170,000 to 200,000 people were evacuated from their homes. 1,600 people perished during the evacuation alone (Johnson, 2015). At least one nuclear plant worker died from lung cancer from direct radiation exposure (BBC News, 2018).

The radiation release created a dead zone around the reactors that may not be safe to inhabit for decades to centuries. The radiation also poisoned the water and food supplies in and around Tokyo. The radiation plume from the plant spread worldwide within a week. Radioactivity spread worldwide, although levels in Japan within 100 km of the plant were extremely high, those in the rest of Japan and eastern China were lower, and those in North America and Europe were even lower (Ten Hoeve and Jacobson, 2012). It is estimated that 130 (15 to 1,100) cancer related mortalities and 180 (24 to 1,800) cancer-related morbidities will occur worldwide, primarily in eastern Asia, over the next several decades due to the meltdown (Ten Hoeve and Jacobson, 2012).

The 1.5 percent risk of a catastrophe due to nuclear power plants is a high risk. Catastrophic risks with all WWS technologies aside from large hydropower (due to the risk of dam collapse) are effectively zero. WWS roadmaps do not call for an increase in the number of large hydropower dams worldwide, only a more effective use of existing ones.

#### [3.3.2.3. Waste Risks](#)

Another risk associated with nuclear power is where to store all the radioactive fuel rods consumed by once-through nuclear reactors and how to prevent their leakage. Currently, most fuel rods are stored at the same site as the reactor that consumed them. This has given rise to hundreds of radioactive waste sites in many countries that must be maintained for at least 200,000 years, far beyond the lifetimes of any nuclear power plant. Plans in the United States, with about one quarter of all nuclear reactors worldwide, to store the waste inside of Yucca Mountain, have not been approved. The more nuclear waste accumulates, the greater the risk of leaks, which can damage water supply, crops, animals, and humans.

#### [3.3.2.2. Uranium Mining Health Risks and Land Degradation](#)

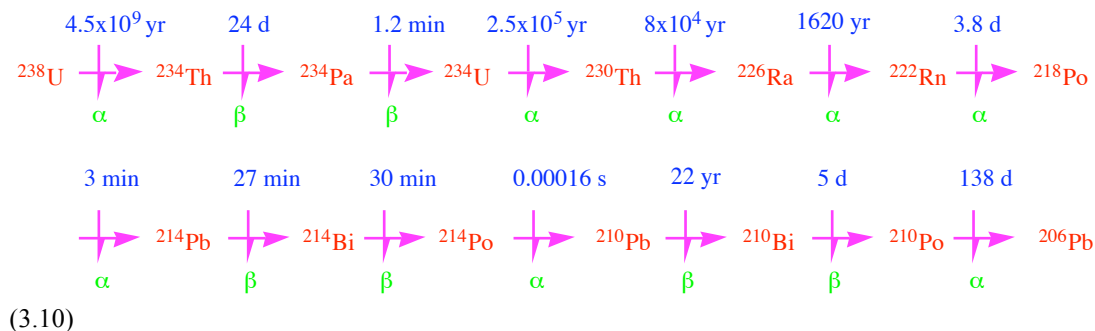
The final risks discussed related to nuclear power are the risk of lung cancer by miners and land degradation due to uranium mining. Such risks continue so long as nuclear power plants continue running because the plants need uranium to operate. WWS technologies, on the other hand, do not require the continuous mining of any material, only the one-time mining to produce the technologies. As such, WWS technologies do not have this risk.

Uranium mining causes lung cancer in large numbers of miners because uranium mines contain natural radon gas, some of whose decay products are carcinogenic. Several studies have found a link between high radon levels and cancer (e.g., Henshaw et al., 1990; Lagarde et al., 1997). A study of 4,000 uranium miners between 1950 and 2000 (CDC, 2000) found that 405 (10 percent) died of lung cancer, a rate six times that expected based on smoking rates alone. 61 others died of mining related lung diseases, supporting the hypothesis that uranium mining is unhealthy. In fact, the combination of radon and cigarette smoking increases lung cancer risks above the normal risks associated with smoking (Hampson et al., 1998).

**Radon (Rn)** is a radioactive but chemically unreactive, colorless, tasteless, and odorless gas that forms naturally in soils. The source of radon gas is the radioactive decay of  $^{238}\text{U}$ . Radon formation from uranium involves a long sequence of radioactive decay processes. During radioactive decay of an element, the element spontaneously emits radiation in the form of an alpha ( $\alpha$ ) particle, beta ( $\beta$ ) particle, or gamma ( $\gamma$ ) ray. An **alpha particle** is the nucleus of a helium atom, which is made of two neutrons and two protons. It is the least penetrating form of radiation and can be stopped by a thick piece of paper. Alpha particles are not dangerous unless the emitting substance is inhaled or ingested. A **beta particle** is a high-velocity electron. Beta particles penetrate deeper than do alpha particles, but less than do other forms of radiation, such as gamma rays. A **gamma ray** is a highly energized, deeply penetrating photon emitted from the nucleus of an atom not only during nuclear fusion (e.g., in the sun's core), but also sometimes during radioactive decay of an element.

The French physicist **Antoine Henri Becquerel** (1871 to 1937) discovered radioactive decay on March 1, 1896. Becquerel placed a uranium-containing mineral on top of a photographic plate wrapped by thin, black paper. After letting the experiment sit in a drawer for a few days, he developed the plate and found that it had become fogged by emissions, which he traced to the uranium in the mineral. He referred to the emissions as **metallic phosphorescence**. What he had discovered was the emission of some type of particle due to radioactive decay. He repeated the experiment by placing coins under the paper and found that their outlines were traced by the emissions. Two years later, the New Zealand-born, British physicist **Ernest Rutherford** (1871 to 1937) found that uranium emitted two types of particles, which he named alpha and beta particles. Rutherford later discovered the gamma ray as well.

Equation 3.10 summarizes the radioactive decay pathway of  $^{238}\text{U}$  to  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ . Numbers shown are half-lives of each decay process.



When it decays to produce radon,  $^{238}\text{U}$  first releases an alpha particle, producing thorium-234 ( $^{234}\text{Th}$ ), which decays to protactinium-234 ( $^{234}\text{Pa}$ ), releasing a beta particle.  $^{234}\text{Pa}$  has the same number of protons and neutrons in its nucleus as does  $^{234}\text{Th}$ , but  $^{234}\text{Pa}$  has one less electron than does  $^{234}\text{Th}$ , giving  $^{234}\text{Pa}$  a positive charge.  $^{234}\text{Pa}$  decays further to uranium-234 ( $^{234}\text{U}$ ), then to thorium-230 ( $^{230}\text{Th}$ ), then to radium-226 ( $^{226}\text{Ra}$ ), and then to radon-222 ( $^{222}\text{Rn}$ ).

Whereas radon precursors are bound in minerals,  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  is a gas and be breathed in.  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  has a half-life of 3.8 days. It decays to polonium-218 ( $^{218}\text{Po}$ ), which has a half-life of 3 minutes and decays to lead-214 ( $^{214}\text{Pb}$ ).  $^{218}\text{Po}$  and  $^{214}\text{Pb}$ , referred to as **radon progeny**, are electrically charged and can be inhaled or attach to particles that are inhaled. In the lungs or in ambient air,  $^{214}\text{Pb}$  decays to bismuth-214 ( $^{214}\text{Bi}$ ), which decays to polonium-214 ( $^{214}\text{Po}$ ).  $^{214}\text{Po}$  decays almost immediately to lead-210 ( $^{210}\text{Pb}$ ), which has a lifetime of 22 years and usually settles to the ground if it has not been inhaled. It decays to bismuth-210 ( $^{210}\text{Bi}$ ), then to polonium-210 ( $^{210}\text{Po}$ ), and then to the stable isotope, lead-206 ( $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ), which does not decay further.

<sup>222</sup>Rn, a gas, is not itself harmful, but its progeny, <sup>218</sup>Po and <sup>214</sup>Pb, which enter the lungs directly or on the surfaces of aerosol particles, are highly carcinogenic (Polpong and Bovornkitti, 1998). Any activity, such as uranium mining, increasing the inhalation of aerosol particles (e.g., dust) enhances the risk of inhaling radon progeny. As such, exposure of uranium miners to radon is another risk associated with nuclear energy.

Like with coal, oil, and natural gas mining, uranium mining also despoils land and reduces the carbon stored in soil. In 2017, 19 countries worldwide mined uranium. Kazakhstan, Canada, Australia, Namibia, and Niger produced the most uranium. Mines can be open pit or underground. Open pit mines cause the most land degradation. Table 10.5 provides an estimate of the effective CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions due to clearing land of vegetation for uranium mining associated with nuclear power. The continuous mining for fuels is not needed in a 100 percent WWS world.



### 3.2.2. Total CO<sub>2</sub>e Emissions Of Energy Technologies

Lifecycle emissions are one component of total carbon equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions. Additional components relevant to fossil fuels with carbon capture include opportunity cost emissions, emissions risk due to CO<sub>2</sub> leakage, and emissions due to covering or clearing land for energy development. These are discussed next.

#### 3.2.2.1. Opportunity Cost Emissions

**Opportunity cost emissions** are emissions from the background electric power grid over a defined period of time (e.g., either 20 years or 100 years) due to (a) the longer time lag between planning and operation of one energy technology relative to another and (b) additional downtime to refurbish a technology at the end of its useful life when its lifetime is shorter than that of another technology (Jacobson, 2009).

For example, if Plant A takes 4 years and Plant B takes 10 years between planning and operation, the background grid will emit pollution for 6 more years out of 100 years with Plant B than with Plant A. The emissions during those additional 6 years are opportunity cost emissions.

Similarly, if Plant A and B have the same planning-to-operation time but Plant A has a useful life of 20 years and requires 2 years to be refurbished to last another 20 year and Plant B has a useful life of 30 years but takes only 1 year to be refurbished, then Plant A is down 2 yr / 22 yr = 9.1 percent of the time for refurbishing and Plant B is down 1 yr / 31 yr = 3.2 percent of the time; thus Plant B is down an additional (0.091 – 0.032) x 100 yr = 5.9 years out of every 100 for refurbishing. During those additional years, the background grid will emit pollution with Plant B.

Mathematically, opportunity cost emissions (E<sub>OC</sub>, in g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) are calculated as

$$E_{OC} = E_{BR,H} - E_{BR,L} \tag{3.1}$$

where E<sub>BR,H</sub> are total background grid emissions over a specified number of years due to delays between planning and operation and downtime for refurbishing of the technology with the more delays. E<sub>BR,L</sub> is the same but for the technology with the fewer delays. Background emissions (for either technology) over the number of years of interest, Y, are calculated as

$$E_{BR} = E_G \times [(T_{PO} + (Y - T_{PO}) \times T_R / (L + T_R)] / Y \tag{3.2}$$



where  $E_G$  is the emissions intensity (g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) of the background grid,  $T_{PO}$  is the time lag (in years) between planning and operation of the technology,  $T_R$  is the times (years) to refurbish the technology, and  $L$  is the operating life (years) of the technology before it needs to be refurbished.

**Example 3.1. Opportunity cost emissions.**

What are the opportunity cost emissions (g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) over 100 years resulting from Plant B if its planning-to-operation time is 15 years, its lifetime is 40 years, and its refurbishment time is 3 years, whereas these values for Plant A are 3 years, 30 years, and 1 year, respectively? Assume both plants produce the same number of kWh/yr once operating, and the background grid emits 550 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh.

Solution:

The opportunity cost emissions are calculated as the emissions from the background grid over 100 years of the plant with the higher background emissions (Plant B in this case) minus those from the plant with the lower background emissions (Plant A). The background emissions from Plant B are calculated from Equation 3.2 with  $E_G=550$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh,  $Y=100$  yr,  $T_{PO}=15$  yr,  $L=40$  yr, and  $T_R=3$  yr as  $E_{BR,H}=550$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh  $\times$  [ $15$  yr +  $(100$  yr –  $15$  yr)  $\times$   $3$  yr /  $43$  yr] /  $100$  yr =  $115$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh. Similarly, the background emissions from Plant A averaged over 100 years are  $E_{BR,L}=550$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh  $\times$  [ $3$  yr +  $(100$  yr –  $3$  yr)  $\times$   $1$  yr /  $31$  yr] /  $100$  yr =  $33.7$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh. The difference between the two from Equation 3.1,  $E_{OC}=E_{BR,H}-E_{BR,L}=81.3$  g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh, is the opportunity cost emissions of Plant B over 100 years.

The time lag between planning and operation of a technology includes a development time and construction time. The development time is the time required to identify a site, obtain a site permit, purchase or lease the land, obtain a construction permit, obtain financing and insurance for construction, install transmission, negotiate a power purchase agreement, and obtain permits. The construction period is the period of building the plant, connecting it to transmission, and obtaining a final operating license.

The development phase of a coal-fired power plant without carbon capture equipment is generally 1-3 years, and the construction phase is another 5-8 years, for a total of 6-11 years between planning and operation (Jacobson, 2009). No coal plant has been built from scratch with carbon capture, so this could add to the planning-to-operation time. The typical lifetime of a coal plant before it needs to be refurbished is 30-35 years. The refurbishing time is an estimated 2-3 years, particularly with capture equipment. No natural gas plant with carbon capture exists, but the estimated planning to operation time of one is similar to that for a coal plant because of the additional difficulty of financing and installing the carbon capture equipment.

For comparison, the planning-to-operation time of a utility-scale wind or solar farm is generally 3-5 years, with a development period of 1-3 years and a construction period of 1-2 years (Jacobson, 2009). Wind turbines often last 30 years before refurbishing, and the refurbishing time is 0.25-1 year.

Table 3.5 provides the estimate opportunity cost emissions of coal and natural gas with carbon capture due to the time lag between planning and operation of those plants relative to wind or solar farms. The table indicates an additional 46-62 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh from the background grid resulting in an investment of fossil fuels with carbon capture instead of wind and solar due to such delays.

**3.2.2.2. Anthropogenic Heat Emissions**

Anthropogenic heat emissions were defined in Section 1.2.3 to include the heat released to the air from the dissipation of electricity; the dissipation of motive energy by friction; the combustion of fossil fuels, biofuels and biomass for energy; nuclear reaction; and the heat from anthropogenic biomass burning. The relative worldwide contributions to each category of heat by each energy generating technology are provided in Jacobson (2014).

Table 3.5 includes g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh emissions for heat of combustion (for natural gas and coal) and of nuclear reaction. However, because the dissipation of electricity to heat per kWh is due to the consumption rather than production of electricity and is the same for all technologies, that term is not included in the table.

Solar PV and CSP convert solar radiation to electricity, thereby reducing the flux of heat to the ground or rooftop below PV panels. This is reflected in Table 3.5 as a negative heat flux.

The CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions (g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh) due to the anthropogenic heat flux is calculated for all technologies (including the negative heat flux due to solar) as follows:

$$H = E_{CO_2} \times A_h / (F_{CO_2} \times G_{elec}) \quad (3.3)$$

where  $E_{CO_2}$  is the equilibrium global anthropogenic emission rate of CO<sub>2</sub> (g-CO<sub>2</sub>/yr) that gives a specified anthropogenic mixing ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere,  $F_{CO_2}$  is the direct radiative forcing (W/m<sup>2</sup>) of CO<sub>2</sub> at the specified mixing ratio,  $A_h$  is the anthropogenic heat flux (W/m<sup>2</sup>) due to a specific electric power producing technology, and  $G_{elec}$  is the annual global energy output of the technology (kWh/yr). The equilibrium global anthropogenic emission rate is calculated as

$$E_{CO_2} = \chi_{CO_2} C / \tau_{CO_2} \quad (3.4)$$

where  $\chi_{CO_2}$  (ppmv) is the specified anthropogenic mixing ratio,  $C$  is a conversion factor (8.0055x10<sup>15</sup> g-CO<sub>2</sub>/ppmv-CO<sub>2</sub>), and  $\tau_{CO_2}$  is the data-constrained  $e$ -folding lifetime of CO<sub>2</sub> against loss by all processes when CO<sub>2</sub> is increasing in the atmosphere. As of 2019, it is ~50 years but increasing over time (Jacobson, 2012a, Figure 3.12).

Equation 3.3 accounts for the emission rate of CO<sub>2</sub> needed to maintain a mixing ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air that gives a specific radiative forcing. It does not use the present day emission rate because that results in a much higher CO<sub>2</sub> mixing ratio than is currently in the atmosphere because CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are not in equilibrium with the CO<sub>2</sub> atmospheric mixing ratio. Equation 3.3 requires a constant emission rate that gives the observed mixing ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> for which the current direct radiative forcing applies. Similarly, the energy production rate in Equation 3.3 gives a consistent anthropogenic heat flux.

Finally, whereas radiative forcing is a top-of-the-atmosphere value (and represents changes in heat integrated over the whole atmosphere) and heat flux is added to the bottom of the atmosphere, they both represent the same amount of heat added to the atmosphere. In fact, because the anthropogenic heat flux adds heat to near surface air, it has a slightly greater impact on surface air temperature per unit radiative forcing than does CO<sub>2</sub>. For example, the globally averaged temperature change per unit direct radiative forcing for CO<sub>2</sub> is ~0.6 K/(W/m<sup>2</sup>) (Jacobson, 2002), whereas the temperature change per unit anthropogenic heat plus water vapor flux is ~0.83 K/(W/m<sup>2</sup>) (Jacobson, 2014). As such, the estimated CO<sub>2</sub>e values for heat fluxes in particular in Table 3.5 may be slightly underestimated.

**Example 3.2.** Calculate the carbon equivalent heat emissions for coal and nuclear power worldwide.

In 2005, the anthropogenic flux of heat (aside from heat used to evaporate water) from all anthropogenic heat sources worldwide was  $A_h=0.027$  W/m<sup>2</sup> (Jacobson, 2014). Assume the fraction of all heat from coal combustion was 4.87% and from nuclear reaction was 1.55%.

Estimate the CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions corresponding to the coal and nuclear heat flux given the total energy generation of  $G_{elec}=8.622 \times 10^{12}$  kWh/yr from coal combustion and  $2.64 \times 10^{12}$  kWh/yr from nuclear reaction.

Assume an anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> direct radiative forcing of  $F_{CO_2}=1.82$  W/m<sup>2</sup>, which corresponds to an anthropogenic mixing ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> of  $\chi_{CO_2}=113$  ppmv (Myhre et al., 2013). Also assume a CO<sub>2</sub>  $e$ -folding lifetime of  $\tau_{CO_2}=50$  years.

Solution:

From Equation 3.4, the equilibrium emission rate of CO<sub>2</sub> giving the anthropogenic mixing ratio is

$$E_{\text{CO}_2} = 1.809 \times 10^{16} \text{ g-CO}_2/\text{yr}.$$

Multiplying the total anthropogenic heat flux by the respective fractions from coal combustion and nuclear reaction gives  $A_f = 0.00132 \text{ W/m}^2$  for coal and  $0.00042 \text{ W/m}^2$  for nuclear. Substitute these and the other given values into Equation 3.3 gives  $H = 1.52 \text{ g-CO}_2\text{e/kWh}$  for coal and  $1.57 \text{ g-CO}_2\text{e/kWh}$  for nuclear.

**Example 3.3.** Calculate the carbon-equivalent negative heat emissions of a solar PV panel.

Solar panels convert about 20 percent of the sun's energy to electricity, thereby reducing the flux of sunlight to the ground. What is the reduction in heat flux ( $\text{W/m}^2$ ) per kWh/yr of electricity generated by a solar panel and what is the corresponding CO<sub>2</sub>e emission reduction? The surface area of the Earth is  $5.092 \times 10^{14} \text{ m}^2$ .

Solution:

If a solar panel produces  $G_{\text{elec}} = 1 \text{ kWh/yr}$  of electricity, the panel prevents exactly that much solar radiation from converting to heat compared with the sunlight otherwise hitting an equally reflective surface. Eventually, the electricity converts to heat as well (as does the electricity from all electric power generators). However, other electric power generators do not remove heat from the sun on the same time scale as solar panels do.

Multiplying the avoided heat ( $-1 \text{ kWh/yr}$ ) by  $1000 \text{ W/kWh}$  and dividing by  $8760 \text{ hr/yr}$  and by the area of the Earth gives  $A_f = -2.24 \times 10^{-16} \text{ W/m}^2$ . Substituting this,  $G_{\text{elec}} = 1 \text{ kWh/yr}$ , and  $E_{\text{CO}_2}$  and  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$  from Example 3.2 into Equation 3.3 gives  $H = -2.23 \text{ g-CO}_2\text{e/kWh}$ .

### 3.2.2.3. Anthropogenic Water Vapor Emissions

Fossil fuel, biofuel, and biomass release not only heat, but also water vapor during combustion. The water results from chemical reaction between the hydrogen in the fuel and oxygen in the air. In addition, coal, natural gas, and nuclear plants require cool liquid water to re-condense the hot steam as it leaves a steam turbine. This process results in significant water evaporating out of a cooling tower to the sky. Many CSP turbines also use water-cooling although some use air-cooling. Similarly, whereas non-binary geothermal plants and some binary plants use water cooling, thus emit water vapor, binary plants that use air cooling do not emit any water vapor. Finally, water evaporates behind hydroelectric power plant dams. Table 1.1 indicates that anthropogenic water vapor from all anthropogenic sources causes about 0.23 percent of global warming.

On the other hand, wind turbines reduce water vapor, a greenhouse gas, by reducing wind speeds, and water evaporation is a function of wind speed (and temperature) (Chapter 7; Jacobson and Archer, 2012; Jacobson et al., 2018a).

In this section, the CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions or negative water vapor emissions from electric power sources are quantified. The CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions due to water vapor ( $M$ ,  $\text{g-CO}_2\text{e/kWh}$ ) from a power plant can be estimated with an equation almost the same as Equation, 3.3, except with the anthropogenic moisture energy flux ( $A_m$ ,  $\text{W/m}^2$ ) substituted for the heat flux:

$$M = E_{\text{CO}_2} \times A_m / (F_{\text{CO}_2} \times G_{\text{elec}}) \quad (3.5)$$

In this equation, the moisture energy flux is obtained from the water vapor flux per unit energy ( $V$ ,  $\text{kg-H}_2\text{O/kWh}$ ) by

$$A_m = V \times L_e \times G_{\text{elec}} / (S \times A_e) \quad (3.6)$$

where  $L_e=2.465 \times 10^6$  J/kg- $H_2O$  is the latent heat of evaporation,  $S=3.1536 \times 10^7$  seconds per year, and  $A_e=5.092 \times 10^{14}$   $m^2$  is the surface area of the Earth.

Combining Equations 3.5 and 3.6 gives

$$M = E_{CO_2} \times V \times L_e / (F_{CO_2} \times S \times A_e) \quad (3.7)$$

which gives the  $CO_2e$  emissions independent of the total annual energy production ( $G_{elec}$ ).

**Example 3.4.** Calculate the carbon-equivalent anthropogenic water vapor emissions from natural gas and nuclear plants.

The global anthropogenic water vapor flux from natural gas power plants in 2005 was  $A_m=0.00268$   $W/m^2$  and from nuclear power plants was  $A_m=0.000746$   $W/m^2$ . The total energy generation from natural gas use was  $G_{elec}=7.208 \times 10^{12}$  kWh/yr and from nuclear was  $2.64 \times 10^{12}$  kWh/yr. Calculate the  $CO_2e$  emissions associated with these fluxes.

Solution:

Substituting  $E_{CO_2}$  and  $F_{CO_2}$  from Example 3.2 and  $A_m$  and  $G_{elec}$  provided in the problem into Equation 3.5 gives  $M=3.69$  g- $CO_2e/kWh$  for natural gas and  $2.81$  g- $CO_2e/kWh$  for nuclear.

**Example 3.5.** Calculate the carbon-equivalent anthropogenic water vapor emissions from a hydropower reservoir.

If the evaporation rate of water from a hydropower reservoir is  $V=1.75$  kg- $H_2O/kWh$  (Flury and Frischknecht, 2012), determine the  $CO_2e$  emissions of water vapor from the reservoir.

Solution:

Substituting  $V$  into Equation 3.7 with  $E_{CO_2}$  and  $F_{CO_2}$  from Example 3.2 gives the carbon equivalent emissions due to hydropower reservoir evaporation as  $M=2.66$  g- $CO_2e/kWh$ .

Wind turbines extract kinetic energy out of the wind and convert it to electricity. **Kinetic energy** is the energy embodied in air due to its motion. For every 1 kWh of electricity produced, 1 kWh of kinetic energy is extracted. Like with all electric power generation, the 1 kWh of electricity eventually converts back to heat that is added back to the air. However, for purposes of assigning  $CO_2e$  emissions or savings, the conversion of electricity back to heat is not assigned to any particular electric power generator in Table 3.5. However, the addition or extraction of heat and water vapor by the energy technology is.

When electricity dissipates to heat, some of that heat returns to kinetic energy. Heat is **internal energy**, which is the energy associated with the random, disordered motion of molecules. Higher temperature molecules move faster than lower temperature molecules. Some of the internal energy in the air causes air to rise since warm, low-density air rises when it is surrounded by cool, high-density air. To raise the air, internal energy is converted to **gravitational potential energy (GPE)**, which is the energy required to lift an object of a given mass against gravity a certain distance. The lifted parcel is now cooler as a result of giving away some of its internal energy to GPE. Differences in GPE over horizontal distance create a pressure gradient, which recreates some kinetic energy in the form of wind (Section 6.8). In sum, wind turbines convert kinetic energy to electricity, which dissipates to heat. Some of that heat converts to GPE, some of which converts back to kinetic energy. If a wind turbine did not extract kinetic energy from the wind, that energy would otherwise still dissipate to heat due to the wind bashing into rough surfaces, which are sources of friction. But, such dissipation would occur over a longer time.

However, **wind turbines have an additional effect, which is to reduce water vapor, a greenhouse gas.** When wind from dry land blows over a lake, for example, the dry wind sweeps water vapor molecules away from the surface of the lake. More water vapor molecules must then evaporate from the lake to maintain saturation of water over the lake. In this way, winds increase the evaporation of water over not

only lakes, but also over oceans, rivers, streams, and soils. Because a wind turbine extracts energy from the wind, it slows the wind, reducing evaporation of water.

By reducing evaporation, wind turbines warm the water or soil near the turbine because evaporation is a cooling process, so less evaporation causes warming. However, because the air now contains less water vapor, less condensation occurs in the air. Since condensation releases heat, less of it means the air cools. Thus, the ground warming is cancelled by the air-cooling due to wind turbines reducing evaporation. However, because water vapor is a greenhouse gas, less of it in the air means that more heat radiation from the Earth's surface escapes to space, cooling the ground, reducing internal energy more than the dissipation of electricity to heat increases it. In sum, wind turbines allow a net escape of energy to space by reducing water vapor. A portion of the lost energy comes from the air's internal energy, resulting in lower air temperatures. The rest comes from kinetic energy, reducing wind speeds, and from gravitational potential energy, reducing air heights. As such, a new equilibrium is reached in the atmosphere. Section 6.9.1 quantifies the impacts of different numbers of turbines worldwide on temperatures and water vapor.

Thus, wind turbines reduce temperatures in the global average by reducing both heat fluxes and water vapor fluxes. Wind turbines do increase temperatures on the ground downwind of a wind farm because they reduce evaporation, but in the global average, this warming is more than offset by atmospheric cooling due to less condensation plus the loss of more heat radiation to space due to the reduction in water vapor caused by wind turbines.

The energy taken out of the atmosphere temporarily (because it is returned later as heat from dissipation of electricity) by wind turbines is 1 kWh per 1 kWh of electricity production. The maximum reduction in water vapor, based on global computer model calculations (Chapter 7), due to wind turbines can range from -0.3 to -1 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh, where the variation depends on the number and location of wind turbines. Example 3.6 provides an estimate of the CO<sub>2</sub>e savings due to wind turbines from these two factors.

**Example 3.6.** Estimate the globally averaged CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions reductions due to wind turbines.

Assuming that wind turbines extract 1 kWh of energy for each 1 kWh of electricity produced and reduce water vapor by -0.3 to -1 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh, estimate the CO<sub>2</sub>e savings from reduced heat and water vapor fluxes due to wind turbines. Assume that, of every 1 kWh of electricity extracted by the wind turbine, a portion would have evaporated 0.3 to 1 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh and the rest would have remained as energy in the atmosphere if the turbine were not operating.

Solution:

Multiplying the latent heat of evaporation ( $L_e=2.465 \times 10^6$  J/kg) and 1 kWh/ $3.6 \times 10^6$  J by -0.3 to -1 kg-H<sub>2</sub>O/kWh gives the reduction in energy available to evaporate water as -0.21 to -0.69 kWh per kWh of electricity-produced. Multiplying 1000 W/kWh and dividing by 8760 hr/yr and by the area of the Earth,  $5.092 \times 10^{14}$  m<sup>2</sup>, gives  $A_m/G_{elec} = -4.6 \times 10^{-17}$  to  $-1.53 \times 10^{-16}$  (W/m<sup>2</sup>)/(kWh/yr). Substituting this and  $E_{CO_2}$  and  $F_{CO_2}$  from Example 3.2 into Equation 3.5 gives the anthropogenic water vapor energy flux from wind turbines as -0.46 to -1.53 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh.

The heat flux is the difference between -1 kWh/kWh-electricity and -0.21 to -0.69 kWh/kWh-electricity, which is -0.79 to -0.31 kWh/kWh-electricity. Performing the same calculation as above gives the anthropogenic heat flux from wind turbines as -1.77 to -0.70 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh. The total heat plus water vapor energy flux savings due to wind turbines is thus -2.23 g-CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh, the same as for solar panels (Example 3.3).

#### 3.2.2.4. Leaks of CO<sub>2</sub> Sequestered Underground

The sequestration of carbon underground due to CCS or CCU (e.g., from injecting CO<sub>2</sub> during enhanced oil recovery) runs the risk of CO<sub>2</sub> leaking back to the atmosphere through existing fractured rock or overly porous soil or through new fractures in rock or soil resulting from an earthquake. Here, a range in the potential emission rate due to CO<sub>2</sub> leakage from the ground is estimated.

The ability of a geological formation to sequester CO<sub>2</sub> for decades to centuries varies with location and tectonic activity. IPCC (2005, p. 216) references CO<sub>2</sub> leakage rates for an enhanced oil recovery operation of 0.00076% per year, or 1% over 1000 years, and CH<sub>4</sub> leakage from historical natural gas storage systems of 0.1-10% per 1000 years. Thus, while some well-selected sites could theoretically sequester 99% of CO<sub>2</sub> for 1000 years, there is no certainty of this since tectonic activity or natural leakage over 1000 years is not possible to predict. Because liquefied CO<sub>2</sub> injected underground will be under high pressure, it will take advantage of any horizontal or vertical fractures in rocks, to try to escape as a gas to the surface. Because CO<sub>2</sub> is an acid, its low pH will also cause it to weather rock over time. If a leak from an underground formation to the atmosphere occurs, it is not clear whether it will be detected or, if it is detected, how the leak will be sealed, particularly if it is occurring over a large area.

The time-averaged leakage rate of CO<sub>2</sub> from a reservoir can be calculated by first estimating how the stored mass of CO<sub>2</sub> changes over time. The stored mass (*S*) of CO<sub>2</sub> at any given time *t* in a reservoir, resulting from a constant injection at rate *I* (mass/yr) and *e*-folding lifetime against leakage *T* (years) is

$$S(t) = S(0)e^{-t/T} + TI(1 - e^{-t/T}) \quad (3.8)$$

where *S*(0) is the stored mass at time *t*=0. The average leakage rate over *t* years is then simply the injection rate minus the remaining mass stored mass at time *t* divided by the *e*-folding lifetime against leakage,

$$L(t) = I - S(t)/t \quad (3.9)$$

The average leakage rate of CO<sub>2</sub> from an underground storage reservoir over a specified period is calculated from Equations 3.8 and 3.9 given an injection rate and a lifetime against leakage.

**Example 3.7. Estimating average leakage rates from underground storage reservoirs.**

Assume a low and high *e*-folding lifetime against leakage of 5,000 years and 100,000 years, respectively. The low value corresponds to 18% leakage over 1000 years, close to that of some observed methane leakage rates. The high value corresponds to a 1% loss of CO<sub>2</sub> over 1000 years (e.g., IPCC, 2005).

Assume also a coal power plant CO<sub>2</sub> emission rate before capture ranging from 790 to 1017 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, a capture rate 90 and 80 percent, respectively (giving a low and high, respectively, emission rate to the atmosphere), and no initial CO<sub>2</sub> in the geological formation. Calculate a low and high CO<sub>2</sub> emission rate from leakage averaged over 100 years, 500 years, and 1000 years.

**Solution:**

The low and high injection rates are 790 x 0.9 = 711 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh and 1017 x 0.85 = 864.5 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, respectively. Substituting this value into Equation 3.8 and the result into Equation 3.9 gives a leakage rate range of 0.36-8.6 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh over 100 years; 1.8-42 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh over 500 years, and 3.5-81 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh over 1000 years.

Thus, the longer the averaging period, the greater the average emission rate over the period due to CO<sub>2</sub> leakage.

**3.2.2.5. Emissions From Covering Land or Clearing Vegetation**

Emissions from the **covering land or clearing vegetation** are emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> itself due to (a) reducing the carbon stored in soil and in the vegetation above the soil by covering the land with impervious material or (b) clearing the land so less vegetation grows. When soil is covered with impervious material, such as concrete or asphalt, vegetation can't grow in the soil or decay and become part of the soil. Similarly, when land is cleared of vegetation, less carbon is stored in the vegetation as well as below ground. Energy facilities result in both the covering of land and the clearing of vegetation.

One estimate of the organic carbon stored in grassland and the soil under grassland, per unit area of land surface, is 1.15 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup> and 13.2 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup>, respectively (Ni, 2002). Normally, when the grass dies, the



dead grass contributes to the soil organic carbon. The grass then grows again, removing carbon from the air by photosynthesis. If the soil is covered instead with concrete, the grass no longer exists to remove carbon from the air no store carbon in the soil. However, existing carbon stored underground remains although some of it is oxidized over time and carried away by ground water.

The carbon emissions associated with an energy facility can be calculated simplistically by first adding the land area on the ground of the energy facility; of the mine where the fuel is extracted (in the case of fossil fuels and uranium); of the roads, railways, or pipelines needed to transport the fuel; and of the waste disposal site. This area is then multiplied the organic carbon stored in vegetation per unit area that is lost plus the organic carbon stored in soil under the vegetation per unit area that is lost. The latter value can be estimated as approximately one-third the original organic carbon content of the soil.

**Example 3.8. Estimating the loss of carbon stored in vegetation and soil.**

Assume a 425 MW coal facility has a 65 percent capacity factor and has a footprint of 5.2 km<sup>2</sup>, including the land for the coal facility, mining, railway transport, and waste disposal. Calculate the emission rate of CO<sub>2</sub> from the soil and vegetation, averaged over 100 years, due to this facility, assuming that it replaces grass and 34% of the soil carbon is lost.

**Solution.** The energy generated over one year from this plant is 425 MW x 8760 hr/yr x 0.65 x 1000 kW/MW = 2.42x10<sup>9</sup> kWh/yr. Over 100 years, the energy produced is 2.42x10<sup>11</sup> kWh.

The carbon lost in soil is 0.34 x 13.2 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup> = 4.5 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup> and that lost from vegetation is 1.15 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup>, for a total of 5.64 kg-C/m<sup>2</sup>. Multiplying by 1000 g/kg and the molecular weight of CO<sub>2</sub> (44.0095 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/mol) and dividing by the molecular weight of carbon (12.0107 g-C/mol) give 20,700 g-CO<sub>2</sub>/m<sup>2</sup>. Multiplying this by the land area covered by the facility dividing by the 100-year energy use gives an emission rate from lost soil and vegetation carbon as 0.44g-CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh, averaged over 100 years.

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**Table 1.2. E-folding lifetimes, 20-year GWPs, and 100-year GWPs of several global warming agents.**

Chemical	E-folding lifetime	20-Year GWP	100-Year GWP
<sup>a</sup> CO <sub>2</sub>	50-90 years	1	1
<sup>b</sup> BC+OC in fossil fuel soot	3-7 days	2,400-3,800	1,200-1,900
<sup>b</sup> BC+OC in biofuel soot	3-7 days	2,100-4,000	1,060-2,020
<sup>c</sup> CH <sub>4</sub>	12.4 years	86	34
<sup>c</sup> N <sub>2</sub> O	121 years	268	298
<sup>c</sup> CFCI <sub>3</sub> (CFC-11)	45 years	7,020	5,350
<sup>d</sup> CF <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub> (CFC-12)	100 years	10,200	10,800
<sup>c</sup> CF <sub>4</sub> (PFC-14)	50,000 years	4,950	7,350
<sup>d</sup> C <sub>2</sub> F <sub>6</sub> (PFC-116)	10,000 years	8,210	11,100
<sup>e</sup> Tropospheric O <sub>3</sub>	23 days	--	--
<sup>f</sup> NO <sub>x</sub> -N	< 2 weeks	-560	-159
<sup>g</sup> SO <sub>x</sub> -S	< 2 weeks	-1,400	-394

GWP=Global Warming Potential.

<sup>a</sup>Low-lifetime of CO<sub>2</sub> is the data-constrained lifetime upon increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from Jacobson (2012a, Figure 3.12); high-lifetime of CO<sub>2</sub> calculated from Figure 1 of Jacobson (2017), which shows CO<sub>2</sub> decreasing by 65 ppmv (from 400 to 335 ppmv) over 65 years upon elimination of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Since the natural CO<sub>2</sub> is 275 ppmv, the anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> = 400-275=125 ppmv, and the lifetime of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> ~ 65 yr / -ln((125-65) ppmv/125 ppmv) = ~90 years. The GWP of CO<sub>2</sub>=1 by definition.

<sup>a</sup>The lifetime of BC+BrC is from Jacobson (2012b) and the GWP is from Jacobson (2010, Table 4), which accounts for direct effects, optical focusing effects, semi-direct effects, indirect effects, cloud absorption effects, and snow-albedo effects. Soot particles in this table are particles containing BC and all organic carbon (OC) (including BrC) emitted from either fossil fuel or biofuel sources.

<sup>c</sup>From Myhre et al. (2013) Table 8.7.

<sup>d</sup>From Myhre et al. (2013) Table 8.A.1.

<sup>e</sup>From Myhre et al. (2013), Section 8.2.3.1. Tropospheric ozone is not emitted so does not have a GWP.

<sup>f</sup>From Myhre et al. (2013), Table 8.A.3, including aerosol direct and indirect effects. Values are on a per kg nitrogen basis

<sup>f</sup>From Streets et al. (2001) and Jacobson (2002), including aerosol direct and indirect effects. Values are on a per kg sulfur basis.

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