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## Survey says: Public OK with nuclear energy

BY ALLISON MILES - VICTORIA ADVOCATE

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More than half of area residents surveyed favor a proposed nuclear energy plant coming to Victoria County, according to a Nuclear Energy for Texans poll.

The organization, a group dedicated to raising awareness about nuclear energy's benefits, found 52 percent of the 601 respondents favored a build in the area.

In December, Exelon Nuclear selected Victoria County as the primary site for a proposed nuclear plant. The company is researching an area, but has not made a decision to build.

Eighteen percent of respondents who favor the plant said it was because of economical issues. Others cited the need for energy, environmental issues and efficiency.

Toward the end of the survey, the public received bits of information regarding the specifics of Victoria's proposed plant, such as waste storage, safety records and inspections. They were asked to gauge their opinions, based on the information.

As respondents' knowledge increased, their support also increased, said Tom Forbes, NET's president.

Craig Nesbit, Exelon Nuclear's director of communication, noticed that, too. People have a distant kind of knowledge regarding nuclear power, he said, but they become more accepting with knowledge.

"Even when they learn the negatives of nuclear power," he said. "And like I've said many times, all power sources have negatives."

The survey results have no effect on Exelon's research process, Nesbit said.

"Although it's nice to know you have that level of support," he said. "We've done some of our own polling a while back and it tracks pretty closely with that."

He noted that Basalice & Associates, Inc., the company that conducted the survey, had previously conducted studies for Exelon.

At face value, NET's name gives the impression that the survey might contain biases, said Bill Jones, spokesman for the O'Connor Ranch interests.

Jones had not seen the survey, but noted that a recent study the O'Connor family conducted revealed different results.

The poll, which also contacted 600 people in April, indicated the number of residents opposed to the plant equalled those who supported it. A considerable number of people remained undecided, he said.

"They're still trying to figure it out," he said. "Any poll that you see right now that is espousing overwhelming or support for the nuclear power plant would be suspect in my mind, especially if it were being conducted by a group that supports the nuclear plant in its name."

Polls are premature because people need answers, local attorney Sandra McKenzie said.

"What it sounds to me like it's showing is that nearly half of the people that are interviewed are not supportive and the other half maybe has not been educated about the cons," she said.

People need information about things such as water access, safety issues and long-term economic impacts, she said, summing up her feelings with a quotation from Mark Twain.

"There's lies, there's damn lies and there's statistics," she said. "And you can make the numbers look any way you want."

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