
Only One in Ten Americans Are Very Knowledgeable About Sources of Electricity

Only one in five are very interested in keeping up to date on energy issues

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – July 30, 2009 – While Congress debates the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, much education is needed to enhance public knowledge, understanding and interest in various sources of electrical power, their associated benefits and risks and the value of becoming more energy efficient.

These are some of the results from The Harris Poll, a new study of 2,177 U.S. adults surveyed online between June 8 and 15, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Only one in ten Americans (9%) are very knowledgeable about sources of electrical power, while half (50%) are fairly knowledgeable. Further, only one in five U.S. adults (21%) are very interested in keeping up to date about energy issues related to the sources of electrical power and energy efficiency with 53% saying they are fairly interested.

When it comes to renewable sources of energy and natural gas, the public overwhelmingly indicates that the benefit of the source outweigh the risks. At least two-thirds of Americans believe that when used, the benefits of solar (82%), wind/turbine (78%), hydroelectric (water) (73%) and natural gas (66%) outweigh any risks associated with the different sources.

Coal, which provides approximately half (49%) of electrical power production in the United States and is the most heavily used source of energy, is perceived differently. Two in five Americans (42%) say the risks of using coal outweigh the benefits while 36% believe the benefits outweigh the risks. Further, almost one-quarter of Americans (22%) say they are not at all sure. Nuclear energy, which is seeing resurgence in the number of new plants, leans towards the benefits with 44% of Americans saying the benefits outweigh the risks and 34% believing the risks outweigh the benefits. With regard to biomass and geothermal, large numbers (60% and 40% respectively) are not at all sure.

So What?

With limited knowledge and interest in the topic, as the debate over the Energy bill rages on, public opinion can be based on incomplete or inaccurate information about the various sources of energy and their perceived benefits and risks. Significant room exists to educate the public on the pros and cons of each source of energy, including factors such as; current and future use of each source, reliability, cost, environmental impacts and ways to become more energy efficient. Much work is needed by Congress, energy companies and communities to engage consumers in the dialogue around this new energy economy.

**TABLE 1
KNOWLEDGE OF ENERGY ISSUES**

“How knowledgeable would you say you are about energy issues as it relates to sources of electrical power and energy efficiency?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
KNOWLEDGEABLE (NET)	59
Very knowledgeable	9
Fairly knowledgeable	50
NOT KNOWLEDGEABLE (NET)	41
Not that knowledgeable	32
Not at all knowledgeable	8

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2
INTEREST IN ENERGY ISSUES**

“How interested are you in keeping up to date about energy issues as it relates to sources of electrical power and energy efficiency?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
INTERESTED (NET)	75
Very interested	21
Fairly interested	53
NOT INTERESTED (NET)	25
Not that interested	22
Not at all interested	3

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3
BENEFITS VERSUS RISKS OF ELECTRICAL POWER SOURCES**

“There are many sources of electric power used in the U.S. In thinking about all the advantages and disadvantages of the following as sources of electric power, do you believe the benefits of each source outweigh the risks or do you believe the risks outweigh the benefits?”

Base: All adults

		Benefits Outweigh Risks (NET)	Benefits Strongly outweigh risks	Benefits somewhat outweigh risks	Risks Outweigh Benefits (NET)	Risks somewhat outweigh benefits	Risks strongly outweigh benefits	Not at all sure
Solar	%	82	68	14	5	3	2	13
Wind/Turbine	%	78	62	17	7	4	2	15
Hydroelectric (Water)	%	73	50	24	7	5	2	20
Natural Gas	%	66	30	36	14	11	3	20
Geothermal	%	52	32	20	7	5	2	40
Nuclear energy	%	44	21	23	34	17	17	22
Coal	%	36	13	23	42	22	20	22
Biomass	%	28	12	16	12	8	4	60

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States June 8 and 15, 2009, among 2,177 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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