

# Monbiot on nuclear - the unattainable standard

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:47 am

---

[George Monbiot has written what he clearly expected](#) to be a controversial blog on the nuclear industry, especially in the light of recent events.

Actually, it's not that controversial. He says:

*Before I go any further, and I'm misinterpreted for the thousandth time, let me spell out once again what [my position](#) is. I have not gone nuclear. But, as long as the following four conditions are met, I will no longer oppose atomic [energy](#).*

1. Its total emissions — from mine to dump — are taken into account, and demonstrate that it is a genuinely low-carbon option
2. We know exactly how and where the waste is to be buried
3. We know how much this will cost and who will pay
4. There is a legal guarantee that no civil nuclear materials will be diverted for military purposes

To these I'll belatedly add a fifth, which should have been there all along: no plants should be built in fault zones, on tsunami-prone coasts, on eroding seashores or those likely to be inundated before the plant has been decommissioned or any other places which are geologically unsafe. This should have been so obvious that it didn't need spelling out. But we discover, yet again, that the blindingly obvious is no guarantee that a policy won't be adopted.

I despise and fear the nuclear industry as much as any other green: all experience hath shown that, in most countries, the companies running it are a corner-cutting bunch of scumbags, whose business originated as a by-product of nuclear weapons manufacture. But, sound as the roots of the anti-nuclear movement are, we cannot allow historical sentiment to shield us from the bigger picture. Even when [nuclear power plants go horribly wrong, they do less damage to the planet and its people than coal-burning stations operating normally.](#)

The five condition are all reasonable.

They have never been met though.

And I'm not at all sure they could be.

That's always been my problem with the industry - fine in theory, undeliverable so far in practice.

But as such they do form the basis for a rational approach to nuclear power - there is in here a standard to aspire to. That's a real basis for debate.

And he remains right on the nuclear industry, it's failings and those of coal.

All of which is sobering.