

New Englanders favor nuclear, wind, competition

An annual survey meant to take the pulse of New England consumers found they overwhelmingly endorse the development of wind generation, support the construction of new nuclear plants and favor competition and choice in the energy marketplace.

The New England Energy Alliance released the results of the April survey on Thursday, which also showed an increase in customers' concern over global warming and their preference for market-based solutions to problems, Paul Afonso, executive director of the alliance, said during a conference call.

Economic issues still dominate the list of consumers' concerns, but it is less of a concern than it was a year ago, with 74% of the respondents expressing concern, down from 83% last year, said Ernest Paicopolos, principal of Opinion Dynamics, which conducted the telephone poll of 700 customers.

When customers were asked the open ended question of what is the single most important energy related issue facing New England today, they responded overwhelmingly that it is the high price of various forms of energy, including electricity. The second highest response was the region's lack of renewable energy.

When asked about their level of concern for specific issues, 83% were concerned or extremely concerned about energy prices and their impact on family budgets and on small businesses. Some 75% expressed concern that businesses in the region are paying 65% more for electricity than the national average.

Six of 10 surveyed were concerned that the region has been slow to install smart meters, Paicopolos said. More than 50% were concerned that many sources of renewable energy are located in remote areas of New England and 52% were concerned about the high cost of renewable resources.

About 70% of respondents said they were either very concerned or somewhat concerned about global warming. Some 80% were willing to pay an additional amount each month to support utility and government efforts to limit the effects of global warming by reducing carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Thirty-one percent were willing to pay up to \$10, and 29% were willing to pay \$1, "even in the midst of this financial turmoil," Paicopolos said.

The majority of respondents said the next generation of power plants should be built by companies where the risk for building those plants is placed on shareholders, while 32% said the plants should be built with ratepayers sharing the risk. Respondents also supported the concept of giving customers a choice to select their power provider by an overwhelming

83%. Only 13% opposed the idea.

The survey showed a dramatic increase in the support of the competitive marketplace, Paicopolos said. This year 63% of respondents said the competitive marketplace would provide adequate financial incentives to spur investment in new generation plants and infrastructure projects. Last year only 47% agreed. Still, 33% of respondents said government should be heavily involved in all aspects of the generation, distribution and consumption of electricity because it is “too important to be left to the competitive market.”

Survey respondents also agreed by 61% that a market-based approach to limiting greenhouse gas emissions such as cap-and-trade is more favorable than a government-driven approach through tougher mandates and new taxes.

Respondents also favor the construction of new nuclear plants. “For the first time since the survey began in 2007 the majority of people in the region favor building new nuclear plants, Paicopolos said. About 44% of respondents oppose the construction of such plants.

Respondents also favor renewing the licenses of existing nuclear plants in Vermont and Massachusetts by 62% compared with 32% who oppose renewals.

About 84% of those surveyed said they either strongly favor or somewhat favor the construction of large wind farms while 14% oppose them. About 44% of those surveyed would be willing to pay 15% more to purchase electricity produced from renewable sources. — *Mary Powers*