

## What is a Nuclear Energy Moratorium?

A nuclear energy moratorium is a state policy that restricts the construction of nuclear power plants. States have implemented moratoria in several ways:

1. Outright nuclear plant construction moratorium
2. Requiring legislative approval for nuclear plant construction
3. Requiring public referendum for nuclear plant construction
4. Nuclear construction moratorium until there is a permanent federal repository for nuclear waste

While these policies differ, they all limit or prevent new nuclear development.

## The History of Nuclear Plant Construction Moratoria

In the mid-1970s, several states implemented restrictions on the construction of nuclear power plants. Rhode Island (1974) and California (1976) were among the first states to establish these restrictions. There were many reasons for imposing restrictions, but the lack of a federal repository for nuclear waste was a primary driver. Concerns about safety, cost overruns, and public opposition, particularly following the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, also played a role in states adopting restrictions.

Following Rhode Island and California, twelve other states adopted some form of restrictions.

## Current State of Play: Lifting Moratoria

Recently, there has been a notable shift in state policy and attitude toward nuclear energy in the United States. In 2016, Wisconsin became the first state to repeal its moratorium, followed by Kentucky (2017) and several other states. In total, **almost half of the states with nuclear restrictions have removed them over the past decade.**

Recent repeals in states such as Illinois (2025) and New Jersey (2026) reflect a broader shift in policy and priority. States are revisiting earlier restrictions in response to rising electricity demand, decarbonization goals, and the need for clean, firm power. Many states are also seeking to capture economic development opportunities associated with new nuclear technologies.



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