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SHOULD NC'S CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE INCLUDE MORE NUCLEAR POWER? DUKE ENERGY THINKS SO – USA TODAY NETWORK

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By Gareth McGrath

When [Duke Energy](#) filed its carbon plan with the [N.C. Utilities Commission](#) in May, there was the usual focus on retiring dirty coal-fired power plants and embracing more renewable energy sources.

The company's proposal was in response to legislation hashed out by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, the GOP-controlled General Assembly, and Duke Energy that committed the Tar Heel State to reduce carbon emissions by 70% from 2005 levels by 2030 and to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. Duke, as the state's largest utility, has submitted several "pathways" to meet the requirement.

But raising some eyebrows was the utility giant's plan to incorporate 570 megawatts of new nuclear power into its future portfolio. These new reactors, however, wouldn't be like the giant plants the company already operates north of Southport on the N.C. coast or in southwestern Wake County.

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They would be much smaller and simpler reactors.

According to the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#), small modular reactors (SMRs) are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 megawatts per unit, which is about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors.

"Small nuclear reactors are essential for Duke Energy's transition to a cleaner energy future," company spokesperson Jennifer Sharpe said via email. "The low-carbon, dispatchable energy of SMRs allows us to ensure reliable service for customers as we add more renewables to our system."

[Duke](#) is the largest regulated nuclear plant operator in the country and plans to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

But the idea of adding additional nuclear power to North Carolina's grid isn't sitting well with everyone.

"The biggest thing is we just don't need them," said Jim Warren, executive director of [NC WARN](#), a Durham-based nonprofit that promotes a swift move

to clean energy options. “They are way too risky in a number of ways and just too expensive for the company and rate-paying customers to get them built.”

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