

Week 3 Assignment: Nuclear Energy and Public Perception

due in section: Thursday, April 16 OR Friday, April 17, 2009

Name: _____ **ID:** _____

Public perception does not consider coal to be a dangerous energy resource. Yet, over the past 10 years, an average of 32.8 people have been killed in U.S. coal mining accidents each year, with 47 deaths just last year. China reports of an average 6000 annual accidental coal mining deaths over the past 5 years. These numbers do not include deaths resulting from, for example, pnuemoconiosis (black lung disease). When miners are killed in mining accidents, the public outcry is for safer mining practices, not the end of coal as an energy resource. The longer term dangers of greenhouse gas emissions, acid rain, and health impacts due to particulate emissions do not typically arise in discussions of the “safety” of coal.

Some argue that public perception distinguishes between risk that impacts one socioeconomic level of society (e.g., coal mining accidents) and risk that impacts all socioeconomic levels (e.g., a nuclear accident). As such, does this argument value lives of the general public more than the lives of coal miners? Or perhaps this argument arises from the fact that coal miners choose to work in a mine (although, in practice, many have few occupational choices) and thus choose to take on that risk. Consider what the public reaction might be if the lives lost in the coal industry were not limited to the workers, but instead were distributed among the general public? Would the public perception of coal mining change? If so, how?

Write a brief paragraph (no more than 250 words) addressing the questions posed here, and come to class prepared to discuss the topic.