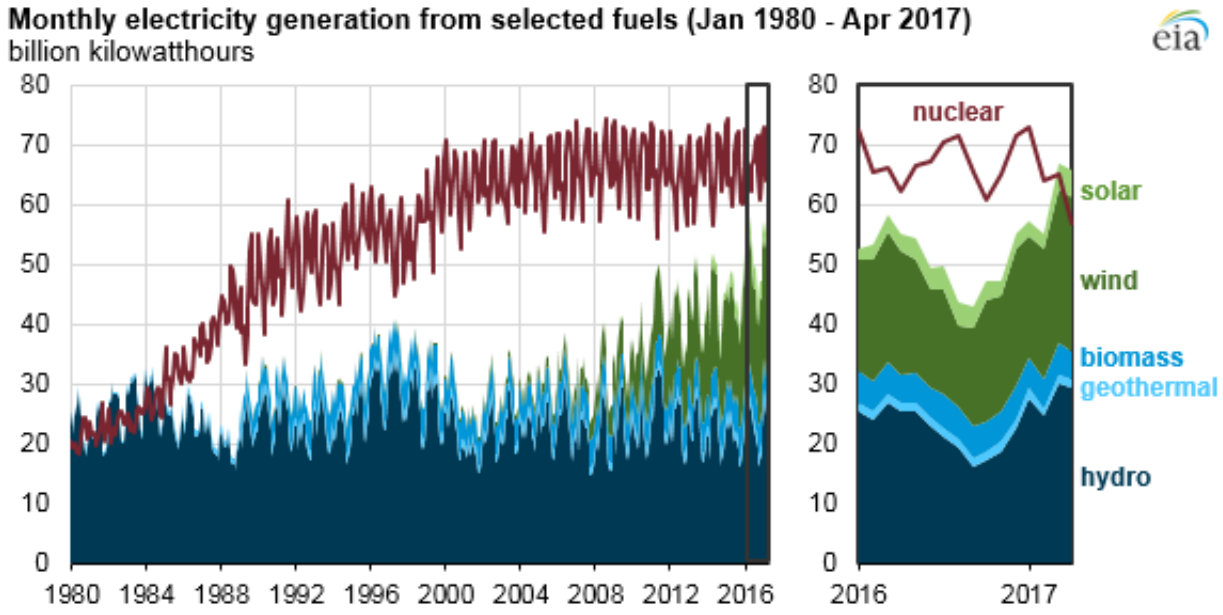
Nuclear generation in April at lowest monthly level since April 2014, says EIA

July 10 2017, by Nancy Owano



Credit: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Monthly Energy Review and Electric Power Monthly

(Tech Xplore)—US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said that in March, and April, U.S. monthly electricity generation from utility-scale renewable sources exceeded nuclear generation for the first time since July 1984.

What contributed to the rise? The report said it was "record generation

from both wind and solar" along with recent increases in hydroelectric power due to high precipitation across much of the West over the winter period.

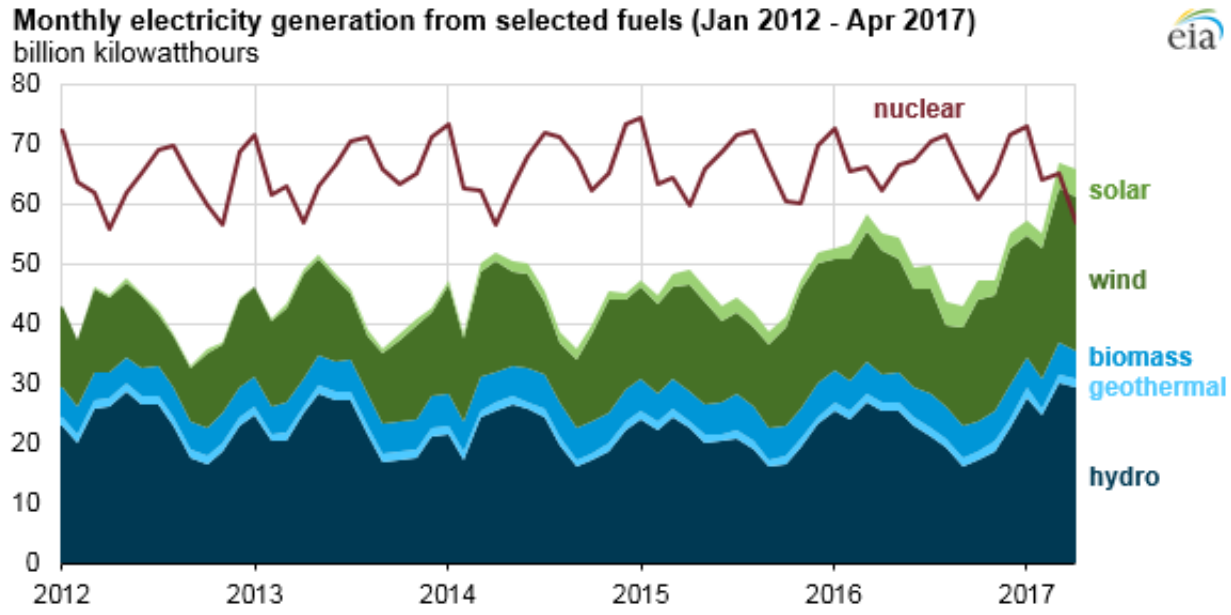
"Electricity generation from wind and solar has increased as more generating capacity has been installed."

Megan Geuss, *Ars Technica*, weighed in, saying "The falling cost of building these renewable plants likely contributed to a peculiarity of the US energy makeup during the months of March and April, as well."

EIA said, "Based on data reported to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and compiled in EIA's daily Status of U.S. Nuclear Outages report, an average of 14 gigawatts and 21 gigawatts of nuclear capacity were offline during March and April, respectively, representing about 14% and 21% of total nuclear capacity in the United States." The EIA said nuclear generation in April was at its lowest monthly level since April 2014.

Production from nuclear plants, however, is expected to outpace renewables for the coming year.

"EIA's latest Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO) projects that monthly nuclear electricity generation will surpass renewables again during the summer months of 2017 and that nuclear will generate more electricity than renewables for all of 2017."



Credit: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Monthly Energy Review and Electric Power Monthly

Geuss wrote, "Subsequent months should see the energy mix balance out again—winds become more variable and nuclear plants ideally will have recovered from any maintenance."

In the bigger picture, though, *EcoWatch* stated that, all in all, "our energy sector is dominated by fossil fuels. Across all sectors, fossil fuels accounted for almost 59 percent of electricity production in the first third of 2017."

As for nuclear power, the EIA also said that "net generation from nuclear power has remained relatively flat since the late 1990s." A number of nuclear plants being retired led to a slightly lower level of overall nuclear generation capacity, it said, and lower level of generation.

What is more, there was a seasonal factor feeding the outcome—not only is solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and biomass electricity produced more than ever before, but nuclear energy also tends to be curtailed in spring and fall. *Ars Technica* said during those seasons, plants are scheduled for maintenance more often because energy demand is lower.

Tom Kenning *PV Tech* similarly wrote, "maintenance and refuelling schedules for nuclear stations were factors. Such maintenance is timed to coincide with the lower power requirements of spring and autumn."

Interestingly, *BBC Future* took a look in June at the nuclear conversation about its use as a power source. "The promise of the 1950s, that nuclear energy would supply practically all of our energy, has faded." The report posed the question, then, of what is its future now that price, safety (Fukushima disaster), and renewable options are focal points as well.

While the Swiss voted to ban nuclear power plants and invest in renewable energy instead, "many countries have by no means given up on nuclear power."

China plans to finish building five new reactors – and start working on eight more, said *BBC Future*. (Reactors cooled with molten salt are being researched at the Shanghai Institute of Applied Physics.)

More information: www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=31932

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