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BURNING FOSSIL FUELS IN OUR BUILDINGS HARMS THE HEALTH OF NEW YORKERS

A New York Statement on Fossil Fuels in Our Buildings

As New York State public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, and physician organizations, we declare burning fossil fuels in our buildings a significant climate and health risk. We call for immediate action to protect the health of New Yorkers and mitigate the current and future impacts of air pollution and climate change. Our organizations agree that:

- ⇒ Exposure to [air pollution](#) is now the **greatest environmental health risk factor** in the United States.
- ⇒ The **research is clear**: burning fossil fuels in buildings releases health-harming pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). Burning fuels in buildings pollutes the air both outside and inside our homes, and is an overlooked **public health concern**.
- ⇒ The health impacts of burning fossil fuels in our buildings demand **immediate action**.

Outdoor air pollution

- NO_x exposure is linked to respiratory diseases, [particularly childhood asthma](#).
 - New York's buildings currently emit [43,000](#) tons of NO_x pollution, more than buildings in any other state.
 - Outdoors, NO_x leads to the formation of ozone as well as PM_{2.5}. Ozone (often called smog) pollution levels in New York consistently [violate](#) health-protective [air quality standards](#) set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ozone exposure has been linked to increases in [respiratory conditions](#) and even premature mortality.
- PM_{2.5} exposure is [associated with](#) dementia, decreased IQ in children, and poor pregnancy outcomes (stillbirth, preterm birth, and low-birth weight), with Black mothers especially at risk. Exposure to PM_{2.5} poses the [highest risk](#) to children, the elderly, and people who are pregnant and have other chronic conditions.
 - Outdoor PM_{2.5} pollution from burning fuels in our buildings led to an estimated [1,300 early deaths](#) in New York in 2017, which translates to roughly \$14.4 billion in health impact costs in 2017.

Indoor air pollution

- Gas stoves are a [significant contributor](#) to poor indoor air quality, emitting several pollutants such as PM_{2.5}, NO_x and deadly carbon monoxide (CO).
 - Pollution levels from everyday use of gas stoves often exceed the limits of outdoor air quality standards, and indoor concentrations are often [much higher](#) than health-protective [guidelines](#) set by the World Health Organization.
 - Children living in a home with a gas stove have a [42% increased risk](#) of current asthma and a 24% increased risk of lifetime asthma.
 - The American Medical Association (AMA), the nation's largest medical society, [recognizes](#) that cooking with a gas stove increases household air pollution and the risk of childhood asthma.
 - [Harvard research](#) shows that gas from stoves contains several chemical compounds, including benzene, a carcinogen for which there is no safe level of exposure.
- ⇒ New Yorkers **at risk** – including children, seniors, pregnant people, low-income communities, communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities and people with chronic disease – already bear some of the greatest [economic, social and health](#) burdens. For example, people of color and low-income residents tend to [live in](#) many of the [hottest urban areas](#) in New York City. Black New Yorkers are [twice as likely](#) to die from heat stress than other New Yorkers.

- People of color in New York are exposed to [2.6 times](#) as much outdoor PM_{2.5} pollution from residential gas appliances as whites.
 - Several high poverty neighborhoods in the Bronx, where two-thirds or more of the residents are people of color, persistently have the [highest rates of asthma-related](#) morbidity compared to the [rest of the state](#).
- ⇒ Low-carbon fuels, such as hydrogen and renewable natural gas, have a **limited role** to play in [New York's buildings](#).
- Current methods of producing fossil-fuel derived hydrogen and feeding hydrogen into the fossil gas (also called “natural gas”) system pose [health, safety and climate risks](#). This has been [recognized](#) by the AMA, who has resolved to advocate to government agencies and federal legislative bodies.
 - NO_x emissions from burning [green hydrogen](#) are much higher than emissions from fossil gas, with research showing emission rates can be up to [six times higher](#).
 - Strategies centered on low-carbon fuels will increase our reliance on fossil fuels – at a time where we need to be urgently focusing on healthy, cost-effective solutions.
 - New York State buildings already emit the [most carbon pollution](#) as compared to any other state, exacerbating climate change.
- ⇒ We call on decision makers in New York; **the Climate Action Council, the New York Legislature, the Governor of New York, and City, County, and other local leaders** to heed the clear scientific evidence and take steps *now* to reduce pollution from our buildings that drives climate change and harms health. These steps include:
- Affirming the critical importance of meeting the emissions and equity goals of the **Climate Act**, which will help mitigate dangerous climate warming while delivering benefits of improving public health, economic opportunities, and quality of life for all New Yorkers;
 - Adopting policies that **prioritize energy efficiency and electrification** in buildings as the primary strategies to replace fossil fuel combustion, especially **phasing in code requirements prohibiting on-site combustion of fossil fuels in new buildings over a 2024-2027 period**;
 - Adopting **zero-emissions appliance standards**, while working with the relevant state agencies to ensure equitable and effective implementation of these rules;
 - Supporting a **planning process to begin scaling down the utility gas system** that maintains affordable, safe, and reliable utility service while protecting ratepayers, utility workers, and New Yorkers in the transition from fossil fuels; and
 - Maintaining **limited use of low-carbon fuels** given the health, safety, cost, and scaling constraints associated with their use in buildings.

New York’s public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, physician, and medical communities are **united in our effort to mitigate climate change and to protect the health of all New Yorkers from current and future climate and health impacts.**

Signed: