



Climate Reality Project Policy
Action Squad for
Contra Costa County



February 15th, 2023

Members of the Sustainability Committee
Contra Costa County

RE: COUNTY ELECTRIFICATION ORDINANCE

Dear Supervisors Glover and Gioia,

More than 73 jurisdictions in California have in some form restricted or banned natural gas in new buildings. We are grateful that Contra Costa County is included in this group, after passing a building electrification (“BE”) [ordinance](#) on January 18th, 2022, requiring new residential, office, retail and hotel buildings to be all electric.

We understand that County planning staff (lead by Demian Hardman-Saldana) are working on long-range plans to phase out fossil fuel systems throughout the entire existing building stock, and the draft plan may be presented to the Sustainability Committee this spring. With this in mind we ask that the proposal below be considered as an item on the Sustainability Committee’s May 15 meeting agenda. This proposed policy can be an interim and immediate step taken to strengthen the existing building electrification ordinance while aligning with the draft plans for existing buildings.

We feel that this is urgent for the following reasons:

- Contra Costa cities look to the County for guidance on updating building codes. In the past year, both Hercules and Martinez modeled their BE ordinances after the County’s BE ordinance. Both omit the same building types that the County’s BE ordinance omits. Neither address building additions or alterations. Other cities are currently looking to put ordinances in place and citing the County as

their “go to” for how to do it . Therefore, it is urgent that the county have the strongest possible ordinance.

- The draft climate action plan has a goal to establish Contra Costa as a leader in climate policy action; this desire and responsibility requires the County to take leadership positions to advance policy action.
- Strengthening the BE ordinance will be essential to meeting climate action goals. Obviously, it is very counterproductive to keep adding additional natural gas heating systems when the goal is to phase them out entirely. The gas infrastructure will be a future stranded asset, requiring conversion at a cost to consumers, businesses, and all utility ratepayers.
- The IPCC, CARB and BAAQMD all recognize that fossil fuel use must be phased out as soon as possible. The plan for existing buildings is going to take time to implement, so the changes we suggest can be an interim step to expedite the reduction of GHGs now.
- The natural gas storage and distribution system leaks the powerful GHG methane, and risks the danger of explosions.
- Gas stoves produce dangerous amounts of air pollutants, including nitrous oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and particulate matter (PM), that often exceed outdoor ambient air standards. These pollutants can have lasting and damaging effects on the human body. Children, low income, and communities of color are among the most vulnerable.

Proposal for next step in the Electrification of Buildings

Add language into the existing ordinance to:

- Include **all** building types.
- Address building Additions and Alterations. Many BE ordinances in California require electric heating systems for building additions and alterations that meet certain criteria. We find that BE ordinances typically trigger electric heating based on the amount of proposed building changes (i.e. a metric that is not tied directly to heating system changes). We recommend the following:
 - **Building Additions and Alterations:** Any new heating system is required to be electric when it will be placed in a new location or is additional to existing heating equipment.
- Include an infeasibility waiver for instances where the owner demonstrates that electric heating is not technically feasible.

We ask that the Sustainability Committee continue to lead on this important solution to the climate crisis, and move a stronger ordinance to the full Board this spring for

consideration and adoption. Electrification of buildings will lead to cleaner, healthier, more affordable, and safer communities.

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions about our requested action.

Signatories for the Contra Costa County Building Electrification Coalition

- Lisa Jackson, 350 Contra Costa Action
- Dr. Robert M. Gould, President, SF Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Fred Bialy, Climate Reality Project Policy Action Squad for Contra Costa County
- Melissa Yu, Senior Energy Campaigns Representative, Sierra Club, San Francisco Bay Chapter

cc: Demian Hardman-Saldana