



Monday, March 4, 2024

Testimony supporting SB 1023

Maryland Building Performance Standards – Fossil Fuel Use, Energy Conservation, and Electric- and Solar-Ready Standards (**Better Buildings Act of 2024**)

Position: **favorable**

**“Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, *do better.*”**

— Maya Angelou

There is no good reason to build a gas-burning building in Maryland ever again.

Today, we can build better buildings than we did in the past: all-electric heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, and induction stoves are more efficient than their gas-burning predecessors, healthier to breathe around, don't require leaking pipes or risk explosions, and protect our damaged climate. Inflation Reduction Act funds are rolling in to help pay for them, too. So now that we know better, state law should require that we do better.

Maryland's faith communities are doing *our* best to care for our neighbors and our common home. And that's why we want to live, work, and pray in buildings that don't burn gas indoors.

Our communities understand the harms of gas-burning because we have measured the pollution ourselves.

We are one of several grassroots organizations in Maryland using hand-held detectors both to measure methane leaks outdoors and to measure nitrogen oxide (NO₂) indoors. NO₂ is a respiratory irritant generated by gas-burning stoves. The EPA's outdoor guideline for safe levels of NO₂ is 100 parts per billion. Our colleagues at Action in Montgomery (AIM), Adama Harouna and her team, have measured NO₂ in over three hundred kitchens at Cider Mill Apartments in Gaithersburg, Enclave high rises in White Oak, and in Northwest Park's garden-style apartments. One such tenant was Ana Argueta in Silver Spring. After her gas-burning stove was on for twenty minutes, measured nitrogen oxide at 434 ppb, four times the EPA outdoor limit. Adama says that many of the kitchens she tests reach unhealthy NO₂ levels when the families cook, contributing to asthma and other breathing problems, especially for young and old. We give a dish towel to every household with a gas-burning kitchen we test, sharing tips for reducing the impact of gas-burning on the air families are breathing.



In December, nearly 400 folks gathered at Good Hope United Methodist Church sanctuary for a statewide action hosted by Action in Montgomery, IPL-DMV, and Maryland Sierra Club. We held up NO₂ readings from our kitchen tests, and a whole section of the room held up red signs with readings over 100.

At community events throughout Maryland, we've also been giving folks a sweet taste of what doing better looks like, serving up chocolate fondue prepared on all-electric induction cooktops.

Electrifying our homes and electrifying gas-burning buildings can be difficult and expensive. By contrast, **building Maryland buildings better to begin with is easy**. That's why diverse and energized grassroots coalitions helped pass all-electric building code bills already in Montgomery County, where we danced the "electric slide" in front of the council chambers, and in Howard County, where a series of passionate high school students led off supportive testimony from over a dozens community groups.

Because of several years of grassroots education undertaken by a dozen organizations, a groundswell of Marylanders know better, and want to do better. We call on our leaders now to do your best for us, too.

Natural gas in homes is risky

When I heard that an apartment explosion in Gaithersburg had destroyed homes in two buildings and injured a dozen people on Wednesday morning, my heart sank ["12 hurt after blast, fire," Metro, Nov. 17].

Just the day before, as a director of the local Interfaith Power & Light, I was sitting in the chambers of the Montgomery County Council as Baltimore Gas and Electric's director for governmental affairs argued that the council should postpone passage of even a modest measure to require new buildings to be built without gas lines. "None of us knows" what a few all-electric buildings a year in the county would do to our infrastructure, he argued, and "we think that's really risky."

This is the third gas-related explosion in Montgomery County in just the past few years. We now know that gas-burning stoves pollute: with nitrogen oxide when they're on and with benzene when they're off. The gas in buildings such as Potomac Gardens is brought by miles of leaking pipes that course all the way back to drill sites where massive methane plumes can be mapped from space. And: As I write this, my devastated neighbors have lost their homes.

What could be riskier than that?

Joelle G. Novey, Silver Spring

COMMENTARY

Commentary: Reflecting on holiday baking traditions and the push for an all-electric building standard

By Guest Commentary

January 5, 2024



Rev. Mary Gaut has a holiday baking tradition that has been passed down through generations. Courtesy photo.

By Rev. Mary Gaut

The writer served for 20 years as the pastor of Maryland Presbyterian Church in Towson and is a 2014 GreenFaith Fellow.

Christmas isn't over, the song reminds us. There are 12 days in the season which ends with the feast of the Epiphany for those in the Christian tradition. But, really, for most of us things are beginning to return to whatever we define as normal these days and the sights, smells, and sounds are already fading into memory as we look ahead to a new year of promise and peril.

For those of us fortunate enough to have friends and family close by, the holiday season was marked by gatherings and the observance of the unique traditions that bind us together. My family has a cake recipe passed down through generations and the smell of that cake baking, with its rich spices, was a hallmark of family gatherings. The tree was in the living room, but the cake was in the kitchen so it's no wonder the kitchen was where we gathered. And it's important that those gatherings be safe as well as festive.

Through the years, as I became more aware of environmental hazards and the impact of our choices on the future of our planet, I also learned that some choices like gas-burning stoves in our homes can have more immediate consequences for those closest to us. Could the stove where that holiday cake was baking actually have exacerbated my daughter's asthma years ago? Turns out the nitrogen oxide, benzene, and methane that are all emitted from gas-burning ovens are not only bad for the environment in general but also for those who gathered in the kitchen as the cake was baking. Yikes. So, when I had to replace my stove, I reviewed the research and went electric.

Prior generations passed along traditions that become the glue that binds us together in families and communities. They also bequeathed to us homes and buildings that rely on fossil fuels to heat and cook, but also pollute our air and damage our climate. They didn't know the impact of those choices — but we do. As we make our individual choices such as moving to all-electric induction stoves for cooking and electric heat pumps for heating and cooling, it makes sense that going forward we act collectively and make sure that all new buildings adhere to an all-electric standard that is proven to be better, healthier, and more conducive to a stable climate and a sustainable future.

Last August, a dozen community groups gathered with elected officials in Reisterstown to advocate for an all-electric building code proposal for Baltimore County (as both Montgomery and Howard counties have already done). But here we are, entering the new year, and no bill has been brought forward. Isn't it time to get this done?

As a pastor I would preach about how the Christmas story was about ordinary people doing the best they could in trying circumstances to shelter and nurture a vulnerable and fragile hope. The story of the "wise men" (celebrated at Epiphany) is in part a story of choosing a new way forward. For the family and friends who will continue to gather in this

new year and for the good of the climate on which all Creation depends, let's make 2024 the year we approve an all-electric building code for all new buildings in Baltimore County, gifting our children and grandchildren with a safer future through the choices we make now.



Guest Commentary



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