

FAQs on Natural Gas Bans

QUESTION

Renewables are the future. Why not use them now?

ANSWER

The advances in renewable energy are exciting and hold plenty of promise. The problem is that the technology isn't ready yet to completely replace our current energy production. It can't meet our needs, especially at our current prices or with today's limited electric storage capability; without electric storage, that renewable energy is only available when it is created, not necessarily when you need it.



QUESTION

I hear talk about solar panels on houses everywhere. What technology is lacking?

ANSWER

The issue is electrical storage and availability. Those solar panels may make lots of electricity in the middle of the day when residential energy usage is low, but in the evening when that demand tends to increase, the sun isn't shining and you still need to get your power from somewhere and storage isn't the answer yet. Chances are that power is from a central power plant and those aren't very efficient. And when demand surges, many power companies raise their rates with variable pricing. In addition, some parts of the country simply don't have the sunlight or wind or rivers that can generate enough reliable power for the community.

QUESTION

What do you mean by efficient?

ANSWER

Many central power plants are powered by coal, nuclear, or natural gas. By the time the electricity is generated and transmitted to your home, the efficiency is only 30-40%. Gas furnaces or fireplaces heat your home directly, and don't lose efficiency from grid losses. A natural gas furnace for example, by law, converts natural gas into usable heat at an efficiency of at least 80%.

QUESTION

What is happening in storage technology?

ANSWER

Electric storage technologies are still very expensive, and mostly focus on giant batteries. One of the more exciting possibilities is renewable natural gas. One great way to store excess solar electricity is to use it to make hydrogen – and then that hydrogen can be mixed with natural gas in the pipelines, making it even cleaner with fewer emissions. Renewable natural gas is also about harvesting methane from landfills, dairy farms, and other sources. Harvesting this gas reduces carbon emissions from those sources and turn it into productive energy.



QUESTION

I'm hearing about natural gas pipeline bans. How would this impact new technologies?

ANSWER

It would eliminate the possibility of renewable natural gas, to start. That is short-sighted. Natural gas is a cleaner option than coal- or oil-fired plants and that means lower greenhouse gas emissions while being consistently available and consistently priced, two things that you can't say about renewable energy.

QUESTION

Why are jurisdictions banning natural gas?

ANSWER

This is a bad decision based on emotions and not science. There is a real interest in many communities to "do something" about climate change and embrace electrification. The thought is that electrification will automatically reduce carbon emissions and that is not necessarily the case. This mindset can lead to hasty decisions that aren't scientifically justified. Natural gas simply isn't the villain that some people are claiming. Did you know that since the 1970s, we've seen 30 million more homes using natural gas for heating and cooking, but the level of emissions from natural gas has remained nearly constant?



QUESTION

Is gas cooking dangerous?

ANSWER

Gas has been used for cooking for decades. Most cooking emissions are created from the cooking process itself and are not dependent on the fuel used. All new homes have exhaust hoods to take cooking odors out of the kitchen. Cooking emissions are minimal and occur only for a few minutes of every day.

QUESTION

Are bans on new gas lines just affecting homes?

ANSWER

No, in many jurisdictions they impact all new buildings or major remodels. Imagine a restaurant, brewpub, or hotel without convenient, low cost natural gas for cooking and laundry.

QUESTION

What are some of the other challenges of electrification?

ANSWER

For starters, what happens when the power goes out? Whether it's by natural disaster or a power company-directed outage, if your home is 100% electric, you have no heat, no hot water, no cooking, no charging of cell phones or electric cars. With a natural gas fireplace or cookstove, you can at least be warm and fed.