HB 1084, SB 5093
2021 SESSION
WASHINGTON

HEALTHY HOMES & CLEAN BUILDINGS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does HB 1084 do?

To meet our state's climate pollution targets, the Healthy Homes & Clean Buildings Act includes many important elements to gradually phase out fossil fuels in our buildings, addressing emissions from new and existing buildings, removing statutory preferences for gas in favor of clean affordable energy, prompting gas utilities to develop plans for meeting the state's climate pollution targets, and setting up a program to develop the market for efficient electric appliances.

What is building electrification?

Instead of relying on fossil fuels to heat our homes and buildings, building electrification ensures we use clean electricity. Approximately 23% of the state's carbon emissions come from buildings, and these emissions are growing at a faster rate than any other source of climate pollution. With the passage of Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act, we are on a pathway to getting fossil fuels out of our electric grid, and now it's time to commit to using our clean grid to transition off of fossil fuels to heat our homes and buildings.

How will I benefit from electric buildings?

Electrification provides a number of benefits, such as cleaner air, healthier and safer homes and workplaces, good jobs, and greater access to affordable clean energy, while also reducing harmful climate pollution. Studies have linked indoor air pollution from gas appliances to significant increases in childhood asthma rates and other respiratory problems, as well as deadly explosions, and we deserve to breathe clean air where we work, go to school, play, and live. As Washington sees higher temperatures and increased wildfire smoke, air conditioning is becoming helpful to protect our health; since electric heat pumps provide cooling with windows closed, using them in place of gas furnaces is another key benefit nowadays.

Do we have enough electricity to have a reliable grid and meet peak energy?

Yes. This bill follows the recommendations of Washington's 2021 State Energy Strategy, which used detailed modeling to ensure that we can maintain a clean and reliable grid as we electrify our homes and buildings. Utilities are continuously planning to ensure they have enough energy to keep our lights on and our buildings warm, regardless of whether load growth comes from population growth, new businesses, transportation electrification or building electrification. The transition to electric buildings won't happen overnight, and this bill allows utilities to proactively plan a gradual transition in a way that works for the grid and provides the most benefits to customers.

Will this increase hydro production?

No. Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act restricts new hydro from being built, prohibiting any new impoundments or diversions. This helps ensure that the resources that utilities will use to meet new electricity needs will come from environmentally responsible, clean resources, like wind and solar.

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If our electricity goes out, how will this bill impact my ability to heat my home?

It is important to remember that most modern gas appliances rely on electricity for controls, pilot lights, and venting—so there's actually no advantage to many gas appliances if the electricity goes out. And we're actually more vulnerable with gas during disasters like earthquakes and wildfires. Gas is responsible for at least 20% of post-earthquake fire ignitions, and is also a liability for recovery because gas lines take 30 times longer to restore than the electric system after natural disasters. To protect lung health during bouts of wildfire smoke when people have to remain indoors, air quality regulators recommend that people don't use gas appliances like stoves, as they emit dangerous air pollutants inside homes, including nitrogen dioxide, formaldehyde, and ultra-fine particles.

Will moving to electric homes and buildings cost more?

Research by the Rocky Mountain Institute shows that in Seattle and other places with similar climates, the average new all-electric home saves $4,500 in up-front costs compared to a new home with gas appliances. Utility customers will also benefit from lessening their exposure to the volatile prices of fossil fuels, as electric rates are more stable. If we keep building with gas, it will cost us far more down the road; new buildings constructed now will last for over 50 years, meaning new gas infrastructure now will become a costly stranded asset—something customers are paying the costs of for years with no benefit to customers.

HB 1084 allows consumer-owned utilities to create electrification programs. Is this prohibited by the Washington State Constitution?

No. What is commonly referred to as a prohibition on fuel-switching is actually a narrow prohibition on the use of conservation financing for this purpose. Like 2019's HB 1512, the public utility electrification authority sections of this bill do not rely on conservation financing; instead, it allows a customer-owned utility to complete a business plan evaluating how building electrification would benefit their system and their customers. Once a utility determines a net benefit from electrification, they can offer programs and incentives consistent with that benefit.

How good are modern electric appliances, compared to gas versions?

Today's electric appliances are excellent. Heat pumps work well in Washington's varied climate zones, including the colder eastern part of the state, to temperatures as low as 5 degrees F. Induction stoves heat up much faster than gas, provide precise temperature control and are easier to clean and safer for kids to be around. Builders in Seattle now already choose electric heat instead of gas in 65% of new homes. Additionally, modern electric appliances use less energy overall than gas-fired equipment because electric is more efficient. Electric heat pumps and heat-pump water heaters are 200-400% more energy efficient than gas-fired equipment, and heat pump clothes dryers are 50-75% more efficient than typical gas dryers.

How will jobs be affected as we transition to electric buildings?

Moving to clean-powered buildings will create jobs in HVAC work—both in gas removal and electric appliance installs, service and maintenance—as well as construction jobs associated with building modifications. A study by UCLA found that updating to efficient electric appliances in California's buildings over the next 25 years would create 100,000 full-time jobs in construction, manufacturing and the energy sector each year. Washington would expect to see jobs numbers for our state proportional to our population and housing stock.