

## The Debate: Natural Gas Bans in New Buildings or Energy Choice?

Does the discussion about the City of Eugene's proposed ban on natural gas for some new homes and businesses have you scratching your head? Have you already formulated an opinion? Do you want to know more?

Take a deeper dive into the issue of natural gas emissions. What does science have to say, and what are the current international, national, state and local conditions? What resources do you need to evaluate the pros and cons of the issue? And who is at the forefront of the local debate?

### Why the focus on methane, natural gas and emissions from buildings?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),

Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a hydrocarbon that is a primary component of natural gas. Methane is also a greenhouse gas (GHG), so its presence in the atmosphere affects the earth's temperature and climate system. Methane is more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. Over the last two centuries, methane concentrations in the atmosphere have more than doubled, largely due to human-related activities. Because methane is both a powerful greenhouse gas and short-lived, compared to carbon dioxide, achieving significant reductions would have a rapid and significant effect on atmospheric warming potential.

- [Visit EPA's Methane page](#) for detailed information about sources of methane, trends, and projections of future methane emissions
- Read GMI's fact sheet, [Global Methane Emissions and Mitigation Opportunities](#)
- View this video which highlights ways that reducing methane can benefit the environment and local communities [https://youtu.be/TL2K\\_Oh4THM](https://youtu.be/TL2K_Oh4THM)

A 2002 report from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *An Eye on Methane: International Methane Emissions Observatory 2022 Report*, delves into the reduction of methane emissions, starting with the fossil fuel sector. The United States is one of the largest emitters of methane in the world with [methane emissions from human activities](#) coming from oil and gas systems, livestock enteric fermentation, and landfills.

<https://www.unep.org/resources/report/eye-methane-international-methane-emissions-observatory-2022-report>

Scientists agree that reducing methane emissions from oil and gas operations is “the simplest, most cost-effective, and most technically feasible methane emissions reduction option at this time.” There is also increased interest in the health implications of exposure to leaked methane from natural gas. A recent research study estimates that methane leaking from stoves inside US homes has the same climate impact as about

500,000 gasoline-powered cars, and the stoves can expose people to respiratory disease-triggering pollutants. These findings from a US House Congressional Report (6-8-2002) and Stanford University (1-27-2022) can be found at:

<https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event>  
<https://phys.org/news/2022-01-scientists-climate-health-impacts>

While the goal to reduce emissions is well understood, how to go about it is at the center of the debate. In general, a climate change platform focuses on protecting the environment and the urgency of stemming climate disruption. A business orientation focuses more on the limitations of regulation and offers a business case for the oil and gas industry.

The Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2021 with “one of the fastest timelines for emissions-free electricity in the country (100 percent clean by 2040 for most of the state’s electricity).” Oregon’s Department of Environmental Quality has since launched a Climate Protection Program that sets a declining limit/cap on greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels used throughout the state.

The Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE) recently released the 2022 [Biennial Energy Report](#). Based on analysis of data and information collected and compiled by the Oregon Department of Energy, it provides data and information on key energy resources, policies, trends, and forecasts, and what they mean for Oregon.” In reference to energy efficiencies in building technologies:

Energy use in buildings across the residential and commercial sectors makes up 25 and 19 percent of Oregon’s 2020 overall energy use respectively and produces 35 percent of Oregon greenhouse gas emissions. While adoption of energy efficiency measures continues to rise in Oregon, there remains significant potential to further reduce building energy use in new and existing buildings with new or improved energy efficiency measures, including construction techniques, efficient equipment and appliances, and equipment controls that reduce the monthly consumption of utility-provided energy.

Locally, to bring this all home, the City of Eugene is proposing a ban on natural gas in new homes and businesses to help meet goals outlined in the City’s Climate Action Plan 2.0 to reduce local carbon emissions. Eugene’s [Climate Recovery Ordinance \(CRO\)](#) calls for a community-wide 7.6% annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. It also calls for a community-wide 50% reduction in fossil fuel use by 2030 compared to 2010 usage. Eugene’s [2017 Community Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory](#) showed that about 282,000 MT CO<sub>2</sub>e (metric tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent) were emitted from natural gas in Eugene in that year, more than 25% of Eugene’s emissions. In addition, it shows that natural gas makes up about 5,300,000 MMBTU (Million British Thermal Units; a thermal unit of measurement for Natural Gas), almost 40% of Eugene’s fossil fuel use if measured by MMBTU.

## Who is at the forefront of the local Natural Gas Ban in New Buildings and Energy Choice Debate?

In a nutshell, supporters urge immediate action to protect the planet while opponents argue that limiting natural gas in new homes and businesses is a ban on energy choice.

Fossil Free Eugene is a coalition of grassroots organizations calling on the City of Eugene to “follow through with the goals that it set for itself and lead the way to forging a just transition away from fossil fuels for all of its residents.” In reference to the City of Eugene’s Climate Recovery Ordinance (CRO) and targets to reduce consumption of fossil fuels, **Fossil Free Eugene** asserts that the City has made little progress; that it is past time to act; and that NW Natural Gas, formerly Northwest Natural Gas Company (an American publicly traded utility headquartered in Portland, Oregon), has launched a campaign that is self-serving. “NW Natural has engaged in an escalating propaganda campaign to mislead its customers, elected officials, and Oregonians at large.”

<https://fossilfreeeugene.org/what-is-fossil-free-eugene/>

Primarily a natural gas distributor, NW Natural services residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Western Oregon and Southwest Washington in the Pacific Northwest. **NW Natural** has teamed up with a number of partners under the moniker **Eugene for Energy Choice** to oppose the City’s proposal, in part by focusing on renewable natural gas and hydrogen. The website for Eugene for Energy Choice makes note of “this collaboration between named partners with NW Natural” and also states “Not paid for by NW Natural customers.” The privacy policy of the website indicates that NW Natural controls and operates the Eugene for Energy Choice site from its headquarters in the U.S. state of Oregon. <https://www.eugeneforenergychoice.com/> and [https://www.eugeneforenergychoice.com/privacy\\_policy](https://www.eugeneforenergychoice.com/privacy_policy)

## What is your position?

When your research is done (and you’ve had a chance to talk it over) tell us what position you propose for your League to express to the City of Eugene and other local leaders.

Note: The League of Women Voters US advocates on climate and energy that support "aggressive efforts to restore balance to the planet's climate systems by reducing the atmospheric carbon dioxide ..." and "environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation and encourage the use of renewable resources."

Research and document prepared by Terry Parker. Proofread and edited by Keli Osborn, Merle Bottge, and Carol Hildebrand.

A final version was printed in the January 2023 ARGUS; the monthly newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Lane County.