

Environment & Energy

# Strongest New Buildings Electrification Rule Passed in Maryland

By Zach Bright

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- Law affects suburban area near nation's capital
  - Measure requires all-electric new buildings by 2026
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Lawmakers from Maryland's most populous county, a suburb neighboring Washington, unanimously passed the state's strongest building electrification measure, which will eliminate fossil-fuel use in nearly all new buildings.

The Montgomery County Council's vote on Tuesday to adopt Bill 13-22 will require the county to adopt all-electric standards for new buildings by 2026. The policy mirrors the energy codes of the nation's capital, which are set to take effect a year earlier, in 2025.

"We've taken a giant step toward cleaner buildings and a better climate today," said Councilmember Hans Riemer, the bill's lead sponsor. "We are confident that other Maryland counties will now follow our lead—and the state General Assembly will follow with its own mandate for fossil-free new construction in just a couple of years."

"There's a history in Maryland that progressive laws of any sort begin in Montgomery County in Maryland, and then spread to other counties, and eventually become state law," said Mike Tidwell, founder of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network.

Under the measure, newly constructed buildings in the county of 1.1 million people will be equipped with electric hot water systems and space heating heat pumps, with exceptions for facilities like hospitals, which require emergency backup power supplies.

The county government has reported that buildings account for nearly half of Montgomery County's total annual carbon emissions.

The move will help lower greenhouse gas emissions to meet the county's 2035 carbon neutrality target and the state's 60% reduction requirement by 2031, according to lawmakers and the coalition behind it, which was made up of groups such as the Sierra Club, 350 MoCo, CASA, and Interfaith Power and Light.

It also would mean lower heating costs for homeowners and tenants, according to a study from the Maryland Office of People's Counsel, which said capital spending by the state's top three utilities on the gas system would cost ratepayers upward of \$35 billion through the next 80 years under current conditions.

The American Medical Association has warned that natural gas leaks can contribute to respiratory problems like childhood asthma, and it's poised to declare gas stoves a public health risk.

Trade associations and business group, including Washington Gas and the chambers of commerce of Greater Bethesda and Greater Silver Spring, opposed the measure. They said it would strain the grid and emergency situations like extreme weather events would lead to outages.

Washington state leads the nation with requirements that all new buildings use electric heat pumps as the primary space and water heating source, a rule passed this month and set to take effect July 1, 2023.

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